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CLASSICS
REVISITED**

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OF JAPANESE
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By Katie Parla

Cover photograph: Christina Holmes
Food styling: Eugene Jho



The centuries-old Basilica di San Pietro in Vatican City stands watch over a rapidly changing Rome. See page 64 for story.

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SAVEUR (ISSN 1075-7864) Issue: No. 181, March 2016. SAVEUR is published nine times a year (January/February, March, April, May, June/July, August/September, October, November, and December) by Bonnier Corporation, 460 N. Orlando Ave., Suite 200, Winter Park, FL 32789. Copyright 2016, all rights reserved. The contents of this publication may not be reproduced in whole or in part without consent of the copyright owner. Periodicals postage paid at Winter Park, Fla., and additional mailing offices. SUBSCRIPTIONS: U.S., \$29.95 for one year, \$49.95 for two years. Foreign surface mail to Canada: \$42.95 for one year; to other foreign destinations: \$55.95. For subscription information in the U.S., call 877-717-8925, outside the U.S., call 515-237-3697, email SAVCustserv@cdsfulfillment.com, or write to SAVEUR, P.O. Box 6364, Harlan, IA 51593. **POSTMASTER:** Send address changes to SAVEUR, P.O. Box 6364, Harlan, IA 51593. For faster service, please enclose your current subscription label. **EDITORIAL:** Send correspondence to Editorial Department, SAVEUR, 15 East 32nd Street, 12th Floor, New York, NY 10016; email: edit@saveur.com. We welcome all editorial submissions but assume no responsibility for the loss or damage of unsolicited material. Retail sales discounts are available; contact Circulation Department. The following are trademarks of SAVEUR and Bonnier Corporation, and their use by others is strictly prohibited: IN THE SAVEUR KITCHEN, SAVEUR FARE, SAVEUR MOMENT

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Publication Agreement Number: 40612608

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A good meal can make your week. A great one can change how you think about food.

In Tokyo a few years ago I lucked into the greatest of lunches in the most unassuming of places: a spare, tranquil, and tiny spot on a humdrum residential block of Shinjuku-ku. The restaurant, Shimahei, specialized in soba, buckwheat noodles. Yoshiaki Shimada, the proprietor and chef, is not young but fiercely agile. Loosely wrapped in a pajama-like robe half open to his chest and shuttling between steaming cauldron and pristine tangle of freshly cut noodles, he produced a soba *kaiseki* menu that was quietly dazzling. A cold soup of buckwheat “milk” was followed by *soba-maki*, or sushi rolls in which cut soba noodles replaced vinegared rice, wrapped in nori around sweet shrimp and a thread of cooked egg. Then a homely gray slightly gooey puck that turned out to be the pre-history of soba on a plate: Before they ate noodles, Japanese monks simply mixed buckwheat flour with water to form the simplest of dumplings, called *soba-gaki*. Conjured in a matter of minutes, still steaming and topped with freshly grated wasabi, Shimada-san’s were mysteriously satisfying, whole-body-warming, sublimely comforting. And of course the cold soba noodles themselves, the true test of any soba maker’s skill. These were chewy, nutty, finely textured—perfect. We drank buckwheat shochu with a touch of the soba cooking water, followed by a sweet *soba-gaki* filled with adzuki bean paste and, finally, mugs of hot soba tea. I left the lunch buoyant, filled with a profound sense of well-being and a new appreciation for

the subtleties of soba, the unforeseen beauty of buckwheat.

Francis Lam writes movingly about his own search for soba mastery in “Sonoko Dreams of Soba” (p. 54). Lam is especially good on the meditative pleasures of cooking and why we chase (though never quite grasp) perfection in a bowl of noodles. This issue is full of quests, big and small, spiritual and otherwise. Lawrence Osborne slips down the rabbit hole of obsession in pursuit of rare Japanese whisky in “The Last Casks of Hanyu” (p. 18). Not everyone would get on a boat to investigate a chocolate-frosted cake. Leah Eskin does in “How Smith Island Cake Got Its Stripes” (p. 38), crossing the Chesapeake Bay to the remote island home of Maryland’s official state dessert. In Turkey, Lisa Abend tags along with chef Mehmet Gürs and his anthropologist associate as they track down purveyors of sour cherry vinegar and the country’s best lamb in “Into Anatolia” (p. 44). And on the cover (and p. 24), an American in London goes looking for the best cream scones, taking cues from baking traditions on both sides of the Atlantic.

I hope these stories inspire some culinary quests of your own, on the road or in the kitchen. While I can’t wait to get back to Tokyo to eat the real thing, for now I’m going to practice at home. The road to buckwheat noodle proficiency will be long (maybe never-ending), but the journey, as they say, is part of the fun.

Adam

Adam Sachs

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The Sprouted Kitchen

BRING DRIED LEGUMES BACK TO LIFE WITH WATER, SOME CHEEEECLOTH, AND A LITTLE PATIENCE

Recipes by Jessica Koslow
Photographs by Ryan Liebe

Every lentil, every chickpea, even every sunflower seed, has a secret green salad hidden deep within it. Dried up and left for soaking, soup-ing, or sprinkling, legumes and seeds can come back to life. With just a few days of moisture and warmth, they transform into sometimes-crunchy, sometimes-delicate, nutrient-packed sprouts.

“Homegrown sprouts add a welcome brightness to everything,” says Jessica Koslow, chef-owner of Los Angeles’ Sqirl restaurant. Koslow has had lines out the door for her rice bowls and fresh salads ever since she opened the “bacon-serving but vegan-friendly” spot in 2012. “I always have buckets of soaking legumes around the restaurant, and I love waiting for the little sprout stems to poke out.”

A sprout is simply a germinated seed, a little newborn plant at most a few inches long, a burst of green life from a tiny, nutrient-dense shell. Making your own (see “Homegrown Sprouts,” page 77) is one of the most convenient and versatile ways to bring fresh greens into your life, particularly when seasonal pickings are slim. Koslow tosses sprouted sunflower seeds with citrus and spicy-sweet shrimp for a vibrant meal during the last gasps of cold; she grinds chickpea sprouts and folds them into a batter for a crisp socca pancake; and she adds a whole medley of sprouted grains to roasted root vegetables for a fresh salad packed with interesting textures.

“It’s in this in-between season that I appreciate them most,” Koslow says, “when spring produce hasn’t yet hit the market, but there’s still something fresh in the kitchen.”

Just-sprouted sunflower seeds are a crunchy, nutrient-packed addition to this grain salad with spiced prawns (see page 15 for recipe).



FOOD STYLING BY MARIANA VELASQUEZ



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Sprouted Chickpea Socca with Herb Salad and Yogurt

Serves 4

Total: 45 min.

Typically a thin crêpe of chickpea flour and water, ordinary socca is transformed here by chef Jessica Koslow into a thicker dinner pancake teeming with cilantro, spices, and sprouted chickpeas. The delicate socca crêpes are crumbly, so flip and handle them carefully.

- 1 tsp. Aleppo pepper
- 1 tsp. whole coriander seeds
- 1 tsp. whole cumin seeds
- 2 1/4 cups sprouted chickpeas (see page 77)
- 1 cup finely chopped cilantro, plus 1/4 cup whole leaves
- 1/4 cup chickpea flour
- 2 Tbsp. fresh lemon juice
- 1 tsp. kosher salt, plus more
- 1/2 tsp. freshly ground black pepper, plus more
- 3 large eggs, lightly beaten
- 3 scallions, finely chopped
- 5 Tbsp. olive oil
- 2 cups loosely packed arugula
- 1/4 cup loosely packed basil leaves
- 1/4 cup loosely packed flat-leaf parsley leaves
- 1/4 cup loosely packed mint leaves
- 1 cup plain, full-fat Greek yogurt

1 In a small skillet, toast the Aleppo pepper with the coriander and cumin seeds over medium heat until fragrant, 2 to 3 minutes. Pour the spices into a spice grinder and pulse until coarsely ground. Scrape the ground spices into a food processor, combine with 2 cups chickpeas, the chopped cilantro, chickpea flour, 1 tablespoon lemon juice, the salt, pepper, eggs, scallions, and 1/2 cup water, and purée into a smooth batter.

2 In a 10-inch cast-iron skillet, heat 1 tablespoon olive oil over medium-high. Spread 3/4 cup batter into an even pancake and cook, flipping once, until golden brown on both sides, about 4 minutes. Transfer the pancake to a plate and repeat with 3 tablespoons more olive oil and the remaining batter to make 3

more pancakes, placing each one on a serving plate as it's finished cooking.

3 In a medium bowl, whisk together the remaining 1 tablespoon lemon juice and 1 tablespoon olive oil. Add the whole cilantro leaves and the remaining 1/4 cup sprouted chickpeas along with the arugula, basil, parsley, and mint. Season the salad with salt and pepper and divide among the plates, piling the salad onto the center of each pancake. Serve immediately with the yogurt, seasoned with salt and pepper, on the side for dipping.

Sprouted chickpeas are ground into the batter to make a denser pancake and served fresh on top for a pleasing crunch.



Sprouted Seed and Grain Salad with Spiced Prawns

Serves 4; Page 12

Active: 1 hr. 10 min.; Total: 1 hr. 45 min.

In Jessica Koslow's grain-bowl-inspired dish, tender and crunchy buckwheat and quinoa, along with sprouted sunflower seeds, are used to add heft and texture to a fresh fennel and mandarin salad topped with sweet spiced shrimp.

- 1/4 cup buckwheat
- 1/4 cup quinoa
- 1 tsp. whole cumin seeds
- 1 tsp. whole fennel seeds
- 2 chiles de árbol, stems and seeds removed
- 8 oz. medium shrimp or prawns, heads and tails on, tail shells removed
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 1 Tbsp. vegetable oil
- 1/2 cup plus 1 Tbsp. fresh lemon juice
- 1 Tbsp. honey
- 3 small mandarin oranges, cut into supremes (saveur.com), plus 1/4 cup mandarin juice
- 1 Tbsp. unsalted butter
- 1/2 cup sprouted sunflower seeds (see page 77)
- 1/4 cup minced cilantro
- 1/4 cup minced dill
- 1/4 cup minced flat-leaf parsley
- 1/4 cup minced mint
- 1/4 cup minced tarragon
- 2 Tbsp. minced preserved lemon rind (amazon.com)
- 1 Tbsp. olive oil
- 3 scallions, thinly sliced
- 2 small heads fennel, finely diced

1 Heat the oven to 350°. Place the buckwheat on a baking sheet and bake until golden brown and toasted, about 8 minutes. Transfer the baking sheet to a rack and bring a large saucepan of water to a boil. Add half the toasted buckwheat to the water and cook until al dente, about 6 minutes. Using a fine sieve, strain the buckwheat and transfer to a plate to cool completely.

2 Reduce the oven temperature to 225°. Add the quinoa to the boiling water and cook until tender, about 15 minutes. Drain the quinoa, spread 1/4 cup out onto a parchment paper-lined baking sheet, and bake in the oven until dry and crunchy, about 20 minutes. Transfer the baking sheet to a rack and let the quinoa cool completely. Reserve the remaining 1/2 cup cooked quinoa in a bowl.

3 In a 12-inch skillet, toast the cumin and fennel seeds and chiles over medium heat until fragrant, 5 to 6 minutes. Pour the spices into a spice grinder and process until finely ground. Scrape the spices into a bowl along with the shrimp, season with salt and pepper, and toss until the shrimp are coated in the spices. Place the skillet over medium-high and heat the vegetable oil. Add the shrimp and cook, flipping once, until cooked through, 2 to 3 minutes. Using tongs, transfer the shrimp to a plate. Pour 1 tablespoon lemon juice, the honey, and the 1/4 cup mandarin juice into the skillet and cook until reduced slightly, about 1 minute. Return the shrimp to the skillet along with the butter and toss the shrimp in the sauce until the butter melts, about 1 minute more. Remove the skillet from the heat and keep the shrimp warm.

4 In a large bowl, toss the toasted buckwheat, the cooked quinoa, and the remaining 1/2 cup lemon juice with the sprouted sunflower seeds, cilantro, dill, parsley, mint, tarragon, preserved lemon, olive oil, scallions, and fennel until evenly combined. Add the mandarin segments, season the salad with salt and pepper, and gently toss again to combine. Divide the salad among 4 large serving bowls and top with the shrimp to serve.

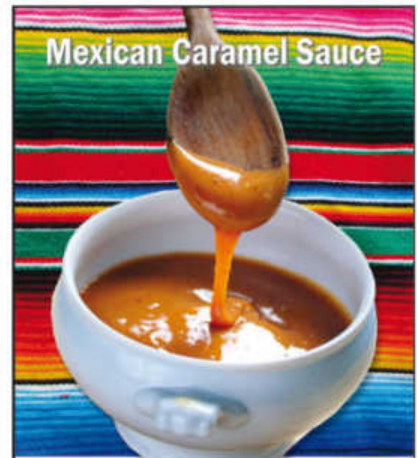
Sprouts, Kohlrabi, and Beet Salad with Herbed Crème Fraîche Dressing

Serves 4; Page 16

Active: 45 min.; Total: 1 hr. 40 min.

Hearty winter beets, kohlrabi, and watermelon radishes are lightened with sprouted lentils, mung beans, and sunflower seeds in this earthy salad from Jessica Koslow. Blanching the herbs for the crème fraîche dressing helps preserve their bright color and keeps them from turning bitter once mixed into the dressing, which can be made up to 3 days ahead.

- 2 small red beets (about 4 oz.)
- 2 small yellow beets (about 4 oz.)
- 3 Tbsp. olive oil
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 1 Tbsp. whole coriander seeds
- 2 cups loosely packed cilantro leaves, plus more to garnish
- 2 cups loosely packed flat-leaf parsley leaves
- 1 cup loosely packed mint leaves
- 1 cup crème fraîche, plus more to garnish
- 1/4 cup fresh lemon juice
- 1/4 cup sprouted lentils (see page 77)



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In a large, heavy-bottom saucepan, combine first four (4) ingredients & place over medium heat. Bring to a simmer, stirring with a wooden spoon to dissolve sugar. Add dissolved baking soda, stirring constantly to avoid overflow.

When bubbling stops, reduce heat to a simmer and add scotch-whiskey. Stir constantly, for about 20 minutes or until the Cajeta is a rich, brown color and thick enough to coat the back of the spoon. It should cool to a medium-thick caramel consistency.

Transfer to clean mason jars and seal tight immediately for cooling. Can be stored for up to 1 month. Suggest warming slightly before serving. Use over ice cream, pound cake or anything as you would a caramel sauce for a wonderful dessert addition!



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Generic “bean sprouts,” as they’re often labeled in supermarkets, are typically made from mung beans. In this kohlrabi, beet, and radish salad (see page 15 for recipe), they’re combined with lentil and sunflower sprouts.

- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup sprouted mung beans (see page 77)
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup sprouted sunflower seeds (see page 77)
- 4 small kohlrabi (about 1 lb.), peeled and cut into $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch-thick wedges
- 4 small watermelon radishes (about 1 lb.), peeled and thinly shaved on a mandoline
- Toasted sunflower seeds (unsprouted), to garnish

1 Heat the oven to 350°. On a baking sheet, toss both of the beets with 1 tablespoon olive oil, season with salt and pepper, and bake until tender, about 45 minutes. Transfer the baking sheet to a rack and let cool for 10 minutes. Peel the beets, cut each into $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch-thick wedges, and transfer to a large bowl. In a small skillet, toast the coriander seeds until fragrant, about 3 minutes. Remove from the heat and let cool.

2 In a large pot of boiling, salted water, add the cilantro, parsley, and mint and cook until wilted but still bright green, 1 to 2 minutes. Drain the herbs and transfer to a bowl of ice water. Drain the herbs once more and spread them out on paper towels to dry, pressing to remove excess water. Transfer the herbs to a blender along with the coriander seeds, 6 tablespoons water, and 2 ice cubes and purée until smooth. Scrape the herb purée into a small bowl, stir in the crème fraîche, and season with salt and pepper.

3 To serve, spoon the crème fraîche dressing on the bottom of 4 serving plates. Add the lemon juice, sprouted lentils, mung beans, and sunflower seeds, the kohlrabi, and radishes to the bowl with the beets, season with salt and pepper, and toss until evenly combined. Arrange the salad over the dressing on each plate and drizzle with more crème fraîche. Sprinkle the salads with the toasted sunflower seeds before serving.

The Science of Sprouts

Seeds of all sorts are at their most nutritious when they’re sprouting. Before they reach this phase, a growth inhibitor called phytic acid keeps vitamins, fiber, and other crucial nutrients locked within their shells, preventing us from absorbing them. This is why cooked dried lentils have only a tenth of the vitamin C of raw sprouted ones. All it takes to dissolve the phytic acid and allow the plants to start growing is a little soak in water. Once you see those telltale green sprouts, you know the seeds will pack a nutrient punch.

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The Last Casks of Hanyu

LAWRENCE OSBORNE ON THE CULT OF ULTRA-RARE JAPANESE WHISKY

My favorite whisky bar in the world is in my adopted Bangkok. A refined and secretive Japanese speakeasy among the girly bars of Soi 33, it's called Hailiang. No sign marks its entrance. Snifters are topped with glass lids. The owner, Jay, an exile from Osaka, carves the ice into perfect spheres. I come here when I want to be alone with an obscure Japanese malt far from the madness of Bangkok streets. One night some months ago Jay and I were talking about the ascendant popularity of our drink of choice: a bottling from Nikka called Taketsuru Pure Malt 17 Years Old (named for the "Father of Japanese whisky," Masataka Taketsuru, who founded Nikka in the 1930s), which took the best blended malt category at the 2015 World Whiskies Awards. Yamazaki Sherry Cask 2013 was recently named the world's greatest whisky by the venerable *Jim Murray's Whisky Bible*.

But it was another, strange-looking bottle I noticed that night that intrigued me

immediately and seemed far more exotic and enticing even than the Yamazaki.

It had a bright pink label showing a kind of Egon Schiele-like Joker in nightmarish lipstick and a red cap, an image suggesting a playing card. The Joker was part of the Hanyu Ichiro Card series, which I had heard rumor of but never been in the same room with, let alone tasted. And it was astronomically expensive, about \$70 a shot. But I had to try it. Jay told me that among Japanese drinkers on expense accounts at Hailiang it was *densetsu*—legendary. I took off the dainty glass lid and peered in.

On the nose: sandalwood and flowers. I took a sip and the enigmatic world of Hanyu opened up to me. Who could imagine a whisky tasting of herbs, figs, and dates? I soon learned that bottles of the Joker go for \$800 and up at auction, but it wasn't price or scarcity that hooked me immediately. What appealed was the sheer complexity and elegance of its profile.

At the members-only Club Qing in Hong Kong, owner Aaron Chan has assembled one of just three complete collections in the world of the rare Hanyu Ichiro Card series, a legendary group of whiskies that can fetch more than \$100,000 per bottle at auction.



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I took a sip and the enigmatic world of the Card series opened up to me. Who could imagine a whisky tasting of herbs, figs, and dates?



There was even a creamy caramel edge to it, like a toffee apple.

Descended from a venerable 17th-century sake business, Hanyu distillery was founded in 1941 and cashed in on Japan's postwar whisky craze. As whisky sales declined in the 1990s, however, the distillery struggled and finally closed in 2000. In this respect it was not atypical of Japan's small specialist distilleries. Karuizawa, another elite whisky from Nagano that is now perhaps the world's most expensive malt, also closed down at about the same time—though both Hanyu and Karuizawa were then revived as their old stock was newly bottled and re-marketed. Both enjoyed the cachet of being whiskies that were no longer being made—that made them finite, and therefore precious.

In 2008 Hanyu was reborn under the name of Chichibu, brought back to life by the original owner's grandson, Ichiro Akuto. Ichiro lent his name to the old stock of malts in casks that he had bottled himself: "Ichiro's Malt." The Card series comprises 54 single malts, 52 of which are labeled and named after a playing card. Two Jokers made of varying blended whiskies complete the deck. Each card is unique because it is casked twice, first in a hogshead, and subsequently in different woods—American oak, sherry casks, or Japanese mizunara oak. I learned from spirits writers that other cards in the series were even greater and rarer—and more expensive.

Living in Asia, I was aware that the region has emerged as the whisky epicenter of the world. Asian drinkers have become obsessed with the "water of life," and not only as a drink. According to the Investment Grade Scotch

index, a Scottish price tracking index, the top 100 single malts have delivered an average return of 440 percent over the last seven years. By comparison, the S&P 500 stock index saw a 31 percent gain and the Liv-ex 100 Benchmark Fine Wine Index saw a 2 percent fall.

Among collectors, meanwhile, the Card series has become more obsession than mere investment. At a historic whisky auction in August of last year, a full set of Card series bottles was put up for sale at Bonham's in Hong Kong. It fetched nearly half a million dollars. Who won this treasure? Bonham's wasn't saying. *The Wall Street Journal* merely informed us mortals that the buyer of the Card series was "Southeast Asian" and that he had also paid \$118,540 for a single bottle of Karuizawa 1960 at the same auction. Both his purchases were world records for Japanese whisky. There was, said Bonham's circumspectly, a "mysterious forest" in the Karuizawa's finish, a hint of damask roses, but this didn't quite explain the \$118,540. Or maybe it did.

Only three men in the world are said to own an entire "deck" of 54 bottles. Presumably none were in Bangkok. If I were going to indulge my newfound taste for Ichiro's handiwork, I'd have to find someone with a collection of Cards and a willingness to share.

One of those outbid at Bonham's turned out to be a young Hong Kong Chinese collector named Aaron Chan. Chan owns a private members' club in Hong Kong called Club Qing, which is one of the most famous Japanese whisky bars in Asia. Though he lost out on the Bonham's set, he was, I discovered, one of

The Chichibu distillery in Saitama prefecture (left) is descended from a sake business that started in the 1600s; bottles from the Hanyu Card series.

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the three owners of a complete Card series. (Another was a wondrously named Swedish collector called Ulf Buxrud, author of a well-known website on Japanese whisky, though my feverish research could not uncover the third man.) A few weeks after the Bonham's sale I flew to Hong Kong, curious to see how many of the Card series bottles were actually available at Chan's bar. It wasn't that I was expecting to be able to drink all 54 of the Cards, but I hoped that at least I'd be able to see them and sample, if possible, an Ace of Spades, a 10 of Diamonds, a 7 of Clubs, a 6 of Hearts, or even a rare Queen of Clubs.

The club is on the tenth floor of the narrow Cosmos Building on steeply pitching and fashionable Lan Kwai Fong in Central. It's a simple bar layout with a terrace for smoking your cigar. Chan was there at the opening hour, and as I stepped into the golden gloom alive with the twinkle of hundreds of bottles, I saw the complete Card series ensconced in 54 niches covering an entire wall and lit like holy relics. It was the first time I had ever seen all 54 editions in one place, each beautifully designed label crafted individually to complement its designated bottle. The simple near-monochrome of the Spades, the spare woodcut imagery of the royals, the tropical flower petals on the 8 of Diamonds, the spiraling red hearts and tumbling cards of the 6 of Hearts. Together they formed a visual harmony that had obviously been very carefully thought through, an austere elegance in conception that matched the qualities of the whiskies themselves. How different this is from the usual bar, with its lineup of predictable suspects wrapped in too-familiar labels. The bottles looked hand-painted, or even hand-made, like pieces of artisan jewelry.

"It's very Japanese," Chan said. "That focus and that attention to detail. You could say that it began as a marketing idea—Ichiro-san came

out of marketing originally—but since each bottle is subtly distinctive and unique, it makes sense. Over many years you can begin to piece the grand narrative together in your mind."

We went to the bar and the moment of truth arrived. Not all the bottles were open and available as shots, but when I asked for the 6 of Hearts, the smile told me that my wish would be granted. A half-shot of the 6 of Hearts ran about HK\$580, or \$80, and about \$3,000 a bottle, so I thought to myself that scoring this one would be about as close as I was likely ever to get to uncovering the enigma of the Card series after my initial love affair with the Joker.

It was poured, a gorgeous dark honey color, and a ferocious nose hit me from the open glass even before it was closer than an arm's length. The intensity made my hairs curl and Chan advised me not to touch it for at least 20 minutes while it opened. Oxygen was indispensable to a Hanyu. I could smell a whiff of vanilla.

While I waited, Chan told me why he collected. He owns an IT company and once also ran a Japanese restaurant in Guangzhou, which he later sold before devoting himself to whisky.

"Over the years I had gotten interested in Japanese malts and I began traveling to Japan to meet Ichiro-san himself. I was intrigued by how the distillery had failed as mass Japanese whisky consumption had declined but then had revived as elite malts began to ascend. It was such a strange story. Ichiro

had inherited a failed business and in the early years he had to go from bar to bar in Tokyo to sell his bottling of the old Hanyu stock. Such incredible persistence! The whiskies were all from the past, from a 'silent' distillery, and sooner or later they would all disappear, but he managed to turn it into a cult. And then I began to acquire some of these Hanyus myself. What fascinates me about them is precisely what distinguishes them from Karuizawas."

Ichiro Akuto (right) resurrected his grandfather's renowned brand in 2008 at Chichibu distillery after generic whiskies fell out of fashion and elite malts began to ascend.

There was in fact an astonishingly dark-hued bottle of Karuizawa 1967 on the bar next to the “6.” Chan explained that Karuizawas were exceptionally consistent because they were casked in the same way all along. But because the Hanyu malts were all casked differently, they were infinitely variable. On the label of the “6,” I saw that it had been distilled in 1991, casked in a hogshead first and then later in an American oak puncheon, a larger type of cask that allows for longer maturation, and then bottled in 2012. The change of woods gave the Hanyu malts their wonderful complexity, and the “6” was a supreme expression of the resulting individuality.

The first sip after a wait of 20 minutes revealed what the flowery writer for Bonham’s had meant when he’d referred to a “mysterious forest.” There was a hint of fragrant sawdust, of leaves.

When I got to the bar, I saw the complete Card series ensconced in 54 niches and lit like holy relics

The peppery nose remained but had died down a bit. The “6” was related to the Joker, as I remembered it, but there was also an orange aroma in it and, as time went by, a soft caramel of some kind.

I reflected that one of the factors that gave this whisky its power, its gravity, was the knowledge on the part of the drinker that it was finite. There are only a few bottles of it left in the world, and they are decreasing day by day, dram by dram, and this gave each sip of the 6 of Hearts a thrilling, almost guilty melancholy. In ten years’ time it’s possible it won’t exist any more—or that what’s left of it will simply be too valuable to drink. We might already be at that point, I thought, looking up at the wall and the glowing bottles in their niches. Who in future years would dare pluck one out and actually drink it? ■

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A Case for Teatime

CLAIRE PTAK EXPLORES THE SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SCONES AND JAM

Photograph by Christina Holmes

Is there anything better at around four in the afternoon than a warm little scone with a bit of cold clotted cream and a dot of jam? No, there isn't. As an American baker working in London, I fell in love with the teatime ritual the day I landed here. After the fog of jet lag, I threw myself into studying the world of British pastries. I was familiar with scones from America, the big triangular doorstep-sized kind my mom used to make in California, shot through with chocolate chips or dried fruit or even wisps of cheese—more cake-like than biscuit-like, really—but what I found in Britain was something altogether different, altogether more refined and intriguing: smaller rounds, not too rich, not too sweet, with a smattering of raisins perhaps but usually plain, each bite flaking off pleasantly in the mouth with a little heft before disintegrating on the tongue.

Hooked, I needed to learn more, so I got out my trusty books—like the *Constance Spry Cookery Book*, which I treat as a sort of British baking bible—and hit the road for scone research trips, from Devon in the west, where the clotted cream is legendary (it's also known as Devonshire cream), to Suffolk in the east, scribbling and nibbling as I went.

The final product I put on my bakery's menu turned out a bit richer than the run-of-the-mill British scone—I couldn't help myself and added heavy cream to the dough like my mom does at home—so of course I got nervous sending my scones out into the mouths of my British customers. In these parts, everyone has a very clear taste memory of teatime, how grandmum made her treats and laid them out, and they don't think they want anything that varies from that memory—even if grandmum's scones tasted like sandpaper and they had to choke down bites between sips of tea. But to my relief, when the piping hot little rounds came out of the oven that afternoon, people flocked to the bakery and haven't really stopped since.

Well, there was *one* proper British lady who came in, ordered a scone, took a bite, then shuffled over to the counter and cried, indignantly, "This is *not* a scone!" I calmly explained to her that it was a hybrid between an American scone and a British one, and she sort of harrumphed. But as she was shuffling her way out, I spied her scarfing up the last few bites. Victory.

Claire Ptak is the owner of London's Violet Bakery.

Sweet Cream Scones

Makes 2 dozen

Active: 35 min.; Total: 1½ hr.

These scones start with butter and flour, as is common with British versions, but then get an added jolt of sugar and heavy cream, like their American cousins. Clotted cream isn't as easy to find in the U.S.; look for it from The Devon Cream Company, available at englishteastore.com.

5 cups (1 lb. 7½ oz.) all-purpose flour, plus more

½ cup (4 oz.) sugar
2 Tbsp. baking powder
½ tsp. kosher salt
14 Tbsp. chilled unsalted butter, cut into ½-inch cubes
2½ cups chilled heavy cream
1 large egg, lightly beaten
Rhubarb and Angelica Jam (see page 25 for recipe), for serving
Clotted cream, for serving

1 In a large bowl, whisk the flour with the sugar, baking powder, and salt. Add the butter and, using your fingers, rub it into the flour until it forms pea-size crumbs. Pour in the cream and stir until the dough

just comes together. Scrape the dough onto a lightly floured work surface and, using your hands, form it into a flat block and let rest for 5 minutes.

2 Fold the dough in half (like closing a book), press into a flat block once again and then let rest for 5 more minutes. Using a rolling pin, flatten the dough block until it's 1-inch thick. Using a 1⅞-inch-round cutter, cut out rounds of dough and transfer to parchment paper-lined baking sheets, spaced 2 inches apart. Place the baking sheets in the freezer and freeze the scones for 20 minutes.

3 Heat the oven to 400°. Remove the scones from the freezer and, using a pastry brush, lightly brush the top of each scone with some of the beaten egg. Bake the scones, rotating halfway through, until risen and golden brown, about 20 minutes. Transfer the baking sheets to a rack and let the scones cool. Serve with the jam and clotted cream.

Rhubarb and Angelica Jam

Makes 2 cups

Active: 40 min.; Total: 1 hr. 40 min.

Claire Ptak likes mixing angelica, a distinct, licorice-like herb, and Chartreuse with tart rhubarb because it cuts the sweetness of the sugar and lends a more complex flavor. Look for angelica fresh at botanical stores and plant nurseries, or in its dried form on starwest-botanicals.com.

- 1¼ lbs. rhubarb, cut into ½-inch pieces (about 3¾ cups)**
- 1¾ cups plus 2 Tbsp. sugar**
- 2 small angelica stalks (optional)**
- Juice of 1 lemon**
- 1 tsp. Chartreuse**

1 In a medium saucepan, combine the rhubarb with half the sugar, toss to coat, and let stand for 1 hour.

2 Add the remaining sugar to the pan along with the angelica and lemon juice, stir to combine, and place the pan over medium heat. Bring to a boil, stirring to dissolve the sugar, and cook, stirring occasionally, for 15 minutes. Stir in the Chartreuse and continue cooking until the jam is thickened and beginning to stick to the bottom of the pan, 3 to 5 minutes.

3 Remove the pan from the heat and scrape the jam into a bowl and let cool completely. Store the jam, covered, in the refrigerator for up to 2 weeks.

English scones tend to be smaller and less sweet than their American counterparts and are typically enjoyed with a dollop of clotted cream and fresh fruit jam.



Nicaragua's Little Corn (pictured here) and neighboring Big Corn islands were British colonies until the late 1800s, remaining culturally distinct from the Spanish-influenced mainland.



Nicaragua's Wilder Shores

THE WATER'S BLUE AND THE FISH IS FRESH ON LITTLE CORN ISLAND

By Michael Ames

It's not easy getting to Little Corn Island. The challenge is part of the charm. At least that's what my girlfriend, Danielle, and I tell ourselves as we step onto the ferry, neither of us quite noticing that it isn't really a ferry, but a working ship transporting thousands of gallons of gasoline. As the boat chugs into stomach-turning swells, diesel fumes fill the cramped passenger hold.

Seeking fresh air outside, I watch three men trolling for fish off the back of the boat, each clutching salt-crusted handlines. On a bench between greasy fuel drums, a gray-haired

German man in wire-rim glasses has wedged himself into a child-sized life vest and stares grimly at the heaving horizon. One errant spark, his fierce look says to me, and we all go down together.

Ten miles and two-and-a-half hours later we enter the calm of Little Corn's protected harbor. Just as we do a springtime squall opens overhead. The rain falls in gray curtains and a dozen teenage boys scramble onto the ship with wooden planks they use to roll the gasoline barrels off the deck and plunk them into the glassy water below.



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Danielle chose Little Corn Island as a vacation spot where the two of us could escape New York's pressure, structure, and noise. There are no taxis honking on this one square mile of land, no streetlights flashing. Electricity runs only at night. We've come for the sounds of waves, the rattling of wind in the palms, and not much else.

What we weren't expecting on this dot of sea-sprayed jungle and sand is compelling food. In most resort destinations, isolation brings overpriced and underwhelming tourist fare. But here, where the local languages include Spanish, an English patois, Garifuna, and the indigenous Miskito, we find a cuisine that is both proudly self-sustaining and utterly fresh. The majority of the food is grown on the islands—bananas, tomatoes, breadfruit, cassava, other tubers—or fished from the surrounding clear turquoise waters. Soon we find ourselves on an unexpected culinary expedition, slurping down fresh coconut juice and inhaling simply prepared ceviche at every turn.

Off the boat, we take refuge under the covered porch of the first restaurant in sight, Miss Bridget's, remove our packs, and grab a table. We order two cold *Toñas* and some curried yellowtail snapper, which comes with a side of crispy golden *tostones* (twice-fried plantains). As with most meals over the next five days, lunch blurs the lines between a commercial transaction and simply eating at someone's home. The bathroom for customers is next to the family's outdoor washboard and drying lines. The veranda at Miss Bridget's, we realize as we sip our beers, is also simply Bridget's veranda.

We dip our *tostones* in the curried milk and are stunned. The silky-spicy sauce, the flaky fresh snapper, the crunch of the *tostones*—how is this food so good? As we sop up the last drops of broth, a man in an American-flag T-shirt at an adjacent table introduces himself. This is Bridget's husband, Elvis, a fisherman, who offers to take us trolling for *barra* (barracuda), king fish (king mackerel), and snapper. Fish and shellfish are plentiful on Little Corn. Spiny lobsters dominate the market—their season runs from midsummer to early spring and is an economic cornerstone—and during the annual August Emancipation Day festival, locals catch blue forest crabs and cook huge pots of crab soup packed with plantains and yucca, all swimming in a rich coconut broth.

Elvis tells us that Bridget will cook whatever we catch. The melody of his baritone has the ring of gospel. How could we say no? We make a date for later that week, sling our packs on our backs, and head into the rain-cooled jungle.

There are no cars on Little Corn—the only “highways” are paved wheelbarrow paths through the Village and Carribe Town. For back roads, miles of dirt trails crisscross mango forests and dead-end at rocky bluffs and coconut grove beaches. Mangoes litter the forest floor in rotting piles—we pick the good ones for tomorrow's breakfast, a kind of island grocery shopping I could get used to. The revolting noni fruit is also ubiquitous. These “hog apples” rot in mucus-colored stains on the ground and smell uncannily like blue-cheese dressing warming in the sun. But the noni fruit is also a sworn tonic for hangovers. At Yemaya, the island's lone upscale resort, they are blended with coconut and cinnamon into a palatable but pungent noni-colada.



At Derek's place on Little Corn's north shore, Rachel Rebeca Sambola López preps a pot of rundown soup (see page 30 for recipe), with fresh coconut bread on the side for sopping up the rich coconut broth.

spiced beef patties, stuffed in golden-orange cornmeal pockets. Habana Libre, a Cuban standout near the harbor, serves the most delicious ceviche we have ever tasted.

At Derek's Place, the mini-resort of Ewok-esque bamboo palapas that we call home on the island's north shore, a cook, Rachel Rebeca Sambola López, introduces us to the local version of “rundown.” The dish is common throughout the Caribbean, but recipes differ; in Jamaica, rundown is a slow-cooked coconut custard. On the Corn Islands and along Nicaragua's east coast, it is more like a Creole bouillabaisse, a heady broth of spices and fresh-pressed coconut milk simmered with whatever seafood the cook finds when she “runs down” to the harbor market.

AIMless walks and random snacks give structure to our days. We wander into Miss Esther's kitchen, a home-bakery hybrid, where a TV on a high shelf plays cartoons and we buy oven-warm coconut bread that smells like toasted coconut oil. We hide in the shade at Alfonso's as his wife presses star fruits into juice from trees in their own backyard. We follow the sounds of reggae to the weekly baseball game, where women sell us peppery fried chicken behind the bleachers and an 8-year-old boy plies the crowd with his mom's

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“This is our food,” López says with evident pride. The golden broth she makes starts with a coconut milk base cooked down with onion, garlic, sweet pepper, curry leaf, chiles, and fresh oregano. Cassava and breadfruit are added, and finally the different types of fish she bought earlier that day at the market.

“Rundown is a hearty food,” she lilts in her Garífuna song. “When you eat, it sits heavy in your stomach.”

We try a second version at Darinia’s Kitchen, where Darinia Jeanneth Bonilla Estrada has turned her modest patio into a cozy and casually charming destination. Hers, a consommé of fish broth and salty-sweet clarified coconut milk, is an elegant interpretation. She adds herbs, carrots,

shrimp, and, on the night we visit, two types of fresh-caught local fish.

On one of our last days, we meet up with Elvis, as planned, to go fishing at dawn. Danielle reels in a fearsome-looking 15-pound barracuda, and with fillets to spare, we head back to Bridget’s. The cook suggests *barra* Caribbean-style—seared and flash-roasted in spiced coconut milk, the same flavors as rundown, but prepared sans broth. After we order, we see Bridget walk out the back door with a young green coconut and a huge machete. This is slow food. We order two more Toñas and sit back. There is nothing more to do, nothing else to see. We look out at the harbor, look back at one another, and think long and hard about nothing at all. ■

Nicaraguan “Rundown” Seafood Soup

Serves 8

Total: 1 hr. 45 min.

Nicaraguan rundown showcases tubers and fresh seafood in a slightly sweet coconut milk broth, and on Little Corn Island, the local seafood always makes an appearance, as the dish is meant to be a catchall for whatever the cooks find at the market. If you can’t find conch, you can replace it with an equal weight of cherrystone or top-neck clam meat. Add it when you add the lobster and mackerel so that it doesn’t get tough.

- | | | | |
|-----|--|------------------------|--|
| 6 | cups unsweetened coconut milk | each cut into 8 pieces | |
| 1 | lb. conch meat, cut into ½-inch cubes | 4 | rock lobster or Maine lobster tails, halved lengthwise |
| 6 | garlic cloves, finely chopped | | Lime wedges, for serving |
| 2 | large Cuban oregano leaves (available at garden nurseries or from jet.com) or 1 standard oregano sprig | | |
| 2 | green bananas, peeled and each cut crosswise into 4 pieces | | |
| 1 | green plantain, peeled and cut crosswise into 8 pieces | | |
| 1 | yellow plantain, peeled and cut crosswise into 8 pieces | | |
| 1 | medium cassava root, peeled and cut into 2-inch pieces | | |
| 1 | medium malanga or taro root, peeled and cut into 2-inch pieces | | |
| 1 | small yellow onion, roughly chopped | | |
| Two | 8-oz. skinless king mackerel fillets, | | |

1 In a large Dutch oven, combine the coconut milk with 4 cups water and add the conch, garlic, oregano, bananas, both plantains, cassava, malanga, and onion. Season with salt and pepper and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat to a steady simmer and cook, stirring occasionally, until the liquid reduces and the vegetables are just tender, about 1 hour.

2 Add the mackerel and lobster and cook until the seafood is tender, about 10 minutes. Remove the pot from the heat, season with salt and pepper, and serve with lime wedges.



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Lee Bailey, the consummate host, at his home on the east end of Long Island, New York, in August 1984.

The Entertainer

AN ODE TO THE ENDURING CHARMS (AND PERFECT CORNBREAD)
OF COOKBOOK AND LIFESTYLE WRITER LEE BAILEY

By Julia Turshen

Lee Bailey was the original food-and-lifestyle guru. Writing and photographing in a pre-Martha Stewart world, he was a pioneer in suggesting that a meal's setting was just as important as the food, that the way you layered sliced tomatoes on a plate mattered, and that a bandana might be used to cradle bread, fruit, and cheese on the way to a picnic, then do double duty as a place mat. He was, as *The New York Times* summed it up in his 2003 obituary, "an expert in the stylish life."

I write cookbooks for a living, and no one has influenced or inspired me more than Lee—even though, it pains me to say, it's likely you've never heard of him. While his legacy isn't quite as imprinted on the culture as other heavy-hitting culinary icons, his books are the ones I have turned to, and continue to turn to, more than anyone else's. They first started appearing in the '80s, a time when, as Nora Ephron once wrote, in *The New York Times Magazine*, "we were looking for applause; we were constantly overreaching; we were desperate to be all things to all people; we were trying to astonish men and outdo other women; we were, in short, out of our minds. Lee, on the other hand, was not." Lee exalted the virtue of pausing to appreciate the little things—the way a napkin is folded, or how a crusty piece of French bread and butter can trump the most elaborate meal. It's a worldview on cooking and entertaining that continues to feel relevant and grounding.

"Lee led the charge of photographing food naturally," Roy Finamore, Lee's editor for many years, told me. "He didn't fuss over food. If a piecrust wasn't perfect, he'd still shoot it because it was real." (I bet Lee would've loved Instagram.) You want to be in the scenes he created, to dunk that black forest ham, rolled like a cigar, into that large bowl of mayonnaise before jumping into the shimmering pool, to throw your bike up against the tree and head to a picnic in the woods where the fir trees bow down in the clearing. And when you see that glass of iced tea, you want to kick your feet up and join him on the porch.

"I guess I will always be a country person, no matter where I might live," Lee wrote at the beginning of *Country Weekends*, his first book, published in 1983. Born in Bunkie, Louisiana, in 1926, he divided much of his adult life between Manhattan and the east end of Long Island. His Southern roots were apparent in everything he wrote and photographed, from the numerous types of biscuits that appear in his books to the

suggestion that the best way to pack ripe peaches for a picnic was to surround them with peanuts in their shells (literal packing peanuts that doubled as a post-lunch snack). He designed dishware and became a shopkeeper, selling a perfectly curated selection of house goods in his own shop and at Bendel's on Fifth Avenue. Rounding out his lifestyle expertise, he was an avid gardener.

I was lucky to meet Lee through my parents, who designed many of his books. Full disclosure, I appear as a 3-year-old in *Country Desserts* reaching for a popcorn ball that's just a tiny bit too far away. My parents regularly cooked his recipes, and as soon as I could hold a knife and navigate a stove, I taught myself how to cook them, too. When I learned how to read, Lee's books were my bedtime tales. I brought them with me to college, where, in between reading literary theory that was (and still is) over my head, they helped remind me of more basic things like chicken pot pie. I schlepped Lee's books in and out of a series of studio apartments I called home and sometimes with me in a suitcase when I traveled, a teddy bear of sorts, a guarantee that no matter where I was, Lee and his voice were along for the ride.

Each Turshen family member has had a "Lee phase." There were years when my dad would present a new "mush" at our weekend suppers, cooked from the vegetable purée section in Lee's *Good Parties*. (It seemed, during one stint, that the carrots would never end—he'd roast twice

as many as we could ever eat just so that he could mash half of them into a soup the next day.) My parents were also fans of Lee's skillet-baked corn, basically a large, crispy corn fritter cooked in a cast-iron pan made blazing hot in the oven.

In the depths of winter, I get out *Country Weekends* and open it to the "At the Beach" menu, which features one of my favorites, sour cream cornbread. It's a nice non-summer stand-in for that skillet corn, made rich with a can of creamed corn and a generous amount of cheddar cheese. As the bread bakes, I'll find myself gazing at the photos for the umpteenth time, at the way the napkin collar is wrapped around the bread, at the way the pink pillows are plumped up by the umbrella in the beach scene. I nearly feel the sand under my feet. I turn back to the oven, take out my golden cornbread, wrap a dish towel around it to form a haphazard napkin ring, and call in whoever's around to taste a buttery, cheesy wedge, a little piece of simplicity, of refined Southern style, to break up the day. ■



"Going to Lee's is like going home... when going home is what it's cracked up to be," wrote longtime friend Amy Goss in the introduction to the first of Bailey's 18 lifestyle books, each one awash in his Southern charm.

**LEE BAILEY'S**

Sour Cream Cornbread

*Serves 8 to 10**Active: 25 min.; Total: 1½ hr.*

This simple Southern-style cornbread harkens to cookbook author Lee Bailey's Louisiana upbringing and highlights his simple entertaining and cooking style. Bailey calls for baking the cornbread in a cast-iron skillet, but you can substitute a well-greased 9-inch metal baking pan.

- $\frac{2}{3}$ cup vegetable oil, plus more for greasing
- 1 cup sour cream
- 2 large eggs, lightly beaten
- 1 medium yellow onion, grated
- One 16-oz. can creamed corn
- $1\frac{1}{2}$ cups yellow cornmeal
- 2 tsp. baking powder
- 1 tsp. kosher salt
- 1 cup (about 5 oz.) grated cheddar cheese

1 Heat the oven to 350° and grease a 9-inch round cast-iron skillet. In a medium bowl, whisk the oil with the sour cream, eggs, onion, and corn until evenly combined. In another bowl, whisk the cornmeal with the baking powder and salt. Add the dry ingredients to the wet ingredients and stir until they form a slightly lumpy batter.

2 Scrape half the batter into the prepared skillet, sprinkle with $\frac{3}{4}$ cup cheese, and spread the remaining batter on top. Sprinkle the top with the remaining cheese and bake until golden brown and a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean, about 45 minutes. Transfer the skillet to a rack and let the cornbread cool for 20 minutes before serving.



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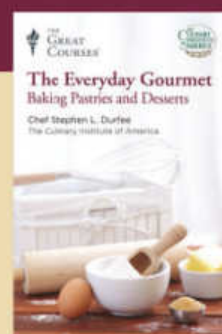
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Sicily, Bottled

A FAMILY-MADE NERO D'AVOLA AS FRESH AND CHARMING AS THE ISLAND IT COMES FROM

By Bruce Schoenfeld

They call winemaking an art, but Natalia Simeti wasn't buying it. Her idea of art meant masterpieces that quickened your pulse, Leonardos and Vermeers and Matisses, not stomping grapes at the family vineyard. So she studied museum management in Italy and the Netherlands and honed her skills as an intern at New York's Whitney Museum of American Art. In 2001, when a master's thesis brought her home to Sicily, she dove into a culturally rich life in Palermo, working in museum communications. Bosco Falconeria, her family's farm an hour west of the city, seemed a world away. (If the name sounds familiar, it's because the 40-acre property played a prominent role in the 1986 book *On Persephone's Island: A Sicilian Journal*, a chronicle of Sicilian life by Mary Taylor Simeti, Natalia's mother.)

But she would visit on weekends, reacquainting herself with the olive groves and vineyards, pitching in when there was work to be done. Before long, she was surprised to find herself

eagerly awaiting her time there. The grapes were a work in progress, evolving from week to week, season to season. The pleasure they provided was visceral, not abstract. One day, after she'd been back in Sicily for four years, an idea occurred to her that she couldn't shake. "I was bored," she says. "And I thought maybe the thing that would make sense would be to take care of the farm."

Bosco has been in the Simeti family since 1933, but following the postwar agricultural crisis and a period of poor management, it hit hard times. In 1966, it fell to Antonio Simeti, Natalia's father, then an agricultural economics professor, to resurrect it. Antonio renewed the vineyards, which included the white grapes that are common in that part of Sicily. He also, almost on a lark, planted the red nero d'avola that covers the island's eastern half. Nobody could remember seeing it grow there, high above the Gulf of Castellammare, but at Bosco it seemed to thrive. "The wine Tonino made from it," Mary recalls, "was always delicious."

Not that anybody else was drinking it. The Simetis initially made only enough for their own table and sold off the remaining fruit in bulk. That's typical in Sicily, where wine production sits somewhere between a hobby and a profession for many families. Eventually, they began selling some of it locally. When Natalia took over in 2007, she ramped up the commercial enterprise. "When I started studying and looking around and understanding what making wine was really about," she says, "I realized there was a lot that we could do."

In her first year, at a time when even the best Sicilian wines were cranked out by large companies using purchased fruit and few had the charm to develop an international following, Natalia took a chance and put her family's white, made from the indigenous catarratto grape, in a bottle with a new label and began selling it on a wider scale. Then she did the same with the nero d'avola.

Today she makes up to 10,000 bottles of wine annually, nearly all of it white. But it's the nero d'avola that transmits the essence of Bosco. Those woody, dark-berry flavors could only emerge from a fecund place, yet the freshness that comes from the breezes off the gulf would be unattainable in the warmer sites on the eastern side of the island. It's also, the Simetis believe, a result of the grapes being grown organically for a quarter-century.

The intricate wine that results is ideal for the roasted lamb and boar that often highlight Sicilian feasts. It doesn't aspire to be art, but a delicious manifestation of a few majestic hills that sit atop a singular island: Bosco in a glass. ■



**BOSCO
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Like Sicily itself, this wine is unpolished, even a little rough, but at its core there's something wild and beautiful about it.

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How Smith Island Cake Got Its Stripes

LEAH ESKIN PEELS BACK THE LAYERS ON MARYLAND'S OFFICIAL STATE CAKE AND ITS MYSTERIOUS ORIGINS

More layers of chocolate icing means more sweet deliciousness—but it also helps keep this layer cake moist and tender for days



Smith Island Cake stands tall, smoothly coated in chocolate icing—no swirls, no rosettes, no bling. Sliced and plated it reveals its genius: pencil-thin layers of pale cake, stacked and spliced with ample icing. It's delicious. And mysterious. I've always wondered, how did this glamorous cake come to dominate a remote, depopulated island?

Curious, I climb aboard the *Captain Jason II*, which shoves off from Crisfield, Maryland, each day at 12:30, bound for marshy Smith Island in the Chesapeake Bay. I step off at Tylerton: population 46, a clutch of crab shacks, weathered pilings, and neat white houses, each topped by a single fat seagull. There are no roads, but I don't have far to go. At the end of the pier sits the home of Mary Ada Marshall, Smith Island's renowned cake lady. She sells hers mail order, and lobbied to get the cake named Maryland's official dessert in 2008.

Mary Ada, 68, shows me how it's made. Not one to work "from the stump," as she calls it, she opens a box of Duncan Hines Classic Yellow Cake Mix. "Way back when my grandma

was little, they had to pre-sift, pre-measure, pre-this, pre-that," she says. "I like modernization." She drops in eggs, evaporated milk, water, and oil, then flicks on the KitchenAid.

She spoons the batter into eight pans, filling them no more than a few millimeters deep. "If I get to the end and I don't have enough," she says, "I go back and rob one pan." She slides the pans into her double oven, letting the cakes turn golden at the edges ("like a vanilla wafer"). Now icing: She heats powdered sugar, cocoa, evaporated milk, and butter into what she calls, with TV-chef poise, "a rich, creamy, slathering chocolate." While the icing is still hot, she smooths and stacks. "I just like them," she says, of the cakes she's been making since she was 11. "And they're usually pretty tasty."

In summer, Smith Island attracts tourists to its salty shores, but on this winter night, with no return ferry, I am Tylerton's only visitor. Mary Ada unlocks the front door of Drum Point Market, which she's run with her son for some 20 years. I buy a crab cake and a cake slice. In the house I've rented, I crisp up the savory cake, then focus on the sweet one. The flavors—choco-

late and vanilla—hardly count as novel. But there's something thrilling about all those skinny strata. And something familiar. They remind me of a Hungarian Dobos torte—thin stripes of pale cake, each lavished with chocolate and stacked tall—the dessert that I, granddaughter of Hungarians, grew up eating on special occasions. Smith Island Cake has a twin. A fancy, far-flung, European twin. It's like *The Parent Trap*—only tastier.

The wi-fi flickers, but I piece together the basics: József Dobos, a dapper, mustachioed gourmet-about-Pest, introduced his confection in 1885. It was constructed from layers of sponge cake, insulated by cocoa buttercream and sealed with a crown of caramel, which helped keep the cake moist and increased its

ers to build to 8-, 10-, 12-, or even 14-story versions. Others say the cakes have always been baked slim, slathered in icing, and stacked high. That's how they stayed moist during the days that the men trawled the waters.

The Marshalls have never heard of Dobos torte. But I've learned that in the 1930s, in New Orleans, Dobos was reformatted as "doberge." It left its telltale stripes, many believe, in the "little layer cakes" of Georgia and Alabama, and the "seven-layer cakes" of South Carolina. Could it also have been the blueprint for Smith Island Cake?

Caroline Ragsdale, owner of Caroline's Cakes in Annapolis, producer of the Dobos documentary *A Cakewalk in Budapest*,



Sleepy Smith Island, 12 miles from mainland Maryland in the Chesapeake Bay and home to its famous eponymous cake (see page 40 for recipe).

shelf life. With refrigeration rare, most pastry went stale within a day; the Dobos torte lasted ten. Dobos wowed the Austro-Hungarian Empire, he shipped his cake across Europe, and, in 1906, he released his secret recipe, hoping it would spread. Had it spread as far as Smith Island?

I find a flashlight and walk back to Mary Ada's house. Seated in the living room I ask her husband, Dwight, about island life. "When I was young there was more people here," he says. At its peak, the island had 800 residents, six stores, three schools. "It was thriving," he says. "It was a whole world in itself."

Dwight, like most island men, worked the water. "Catching crabs and fish and oysters and clams and terrapins and all this stuff—it's fun," he says. "It's like you're finding treasure in the water." Mary Ada, like most island women, picked crabs and cooked the local cuisine known for its crab cakes, wild duck, fig preserves. And cake.

"My grandmother made it," says Mary Ada. "My mom, my sister. It's just a Smith Island thing." She remembers the cake with fewer, thicker layers; competition has spurred today's bak-

and something of a József Dobos fangirl, swears the answer is yes. "If I had to put my life savings on it, I'd say that Smith Island Cake came from the Dobos torte," Ragsdale told me before I went to Smith Island. "It's the great-grandfather of all multilayered cakes." Susan Stiles Dowell, co-author of *Mrs. Kitching's Smith Island Cookbook*, thinks not. "It's a 400-year-old culture on the island," she says. "The foodways, they're isolated." Some wonder if the cake, like the islanders and their unique drawl, dates to 17th-century Cornwall.

If the cake has changed little, island life has changed a lot. "Time's moved on," says Dwight. "Everything never stays the same." Erosion, troubles in the water trade, and the lure of the mainland have left about 200 full-time residents. The Marshalls' daughter and three sons all settled off-island. "There's no children being born," says Mary Ada. "There's no marriages. Someday, we're not going to be here."

In the morning, I stop by Mary Ada's sweet-scented kitchen to pick up a cake, one of four she's baked predawn. On the wall is a framed clip from *The New York Times* covering the

SWEETS



New Orleans doberge cake, which has thicker layers than its Smith Island cousin and chocolate and lemon fillings.

campaign to make Smith Island Cake Maryland's state dessert. When it passed, she says, "I thought I'd won the Super Bowl." It brought some work to the island, and inspired entrepreneur Brian Murphy to open Smith Island Baking Company in the largest town, Ewell. The bakery—which recently moved more than 1,000 Lemon Creams via QVC—has since moved to the mainland. Says Murphy: "We really do consider ourselves custodians of a treasure." Mary Ada begs to differ, and dismisses cakes baked off-island.

Balancing the heavy cardboard box, I climb onto the ferry along with the six lone children who live in Tylerton. They scramble off at Ewell for school. On the trip back to the mainland, I stare at the choppy white foam riding the gray wake. I mull over Smith Island Cake and its secret twin. Maybe the American cake is an adaptation of the Hungarian torte. Maybe each developed separately, in similar ways. Maybe, as some historians have it, both are descendants of the pancake, which has long been piled into "stack cakes" on both sides of the Atlantic.

No explanation, however, loosens the bond between the tall cake and its low-lying home. The cake represents Smith Island—a place anchored to its unique past, a place worrying about its tenuous future, a place that can be conjured in an instant via a sticky, many-layered bite. ■

Classic Smith Island Cake

Serves 12 to 16; 📖 **Page 38**
Active: 2 hr.; Total: 3 ½ hr.

This sumptuous layer cake from Smith Island, off the mainland coast of Maryland, here consists of 10 thin layers of cake stacked and frosted with old-fashioned chocolate fudge icing. This recipe calls for baking the layers individually; see page 79 for tips on how to ensure each layer is even in thickness so that the finished cake stands evenly tall as well.

For the cake layers:

- 3 cups (14 oz.) all-purpose flour
- 2 tsp. baking powder
- ½ tsp. kosher salt
- 2 cups (15 ¼ oz.) sugar
- 2 sticks unsalted butter, melted
- 5 large eggs
- 1 cup evaporated milk
- 2 tsp. vanilla extract

For the fudge icing:

- 2 ⅔ cups (1 lb. 4 ½ oz.) sugar
- 1 ⅓ cups evaporated milk
- 6 oz. high-quality unsweetened chocolate, roughly chopped
- 10 Tbsp. unsalted butter, melted
- 1 ½ tsp. vanilla extract

1 Make the cakes: Heat the oven to 350°. Line two 9-inch round cake pans with parchment paper circles, and spray with nonstick baking spray (see page 79). In a large bowl, whisk the flour with the baking powder and salt. In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with a paddle, cream the sugar with the butter on medium

speed until pale and fluffy, about 3 minutes. Add the eggs, one at a time, beating well after each addition, until smooth. Reduce the mixer speed to low and add the dry ingredients, followed immediately by the milk, vanilla, and ½ cup water, and mix until the batter just comes together. Using a rubber spatula, stir the batter again until smooth.

2 Pour ⅔ cup of the cake batter into each prepared cake pan and, using a small offset spatula, spread the cake batter evenly over the bottom of each pan (see page 79). Bake the cakes, rotating the pans halfway through cooking, until lightly browned and cooked through, 12 to 14 minutes. Transfer the pans to a rack, let the cakes cool for 10 minutes, and then invert the cakes onto the rack and remove the parchment paper. Once the cake pans are cool, re-line with parchment paper and coat again with nonstick baking spray. Repeat baking with the remaining batter to make 10 thin cakes total and let them all cool completely.

3 Make the fudge icing and assemble the cake: In a large copper or enameled cast-iron pan (these pans retain heat well, which helps prevent the icing from seizing), combine the sugar with the milk and place over medium-low heat, stirring until the sugar dissolves. Add the chocolate and butter and stir until the chocolate melts. Increase the heat to medium and cook, stirring occasionally, until the icing is thick and glossy and has the consistency of hot fudge sauce, about 15 minutes. Remove the pan from the heat and stir in the vanilla.

4 Place 1 cake layer on a cake stand and, using a small offset spatula (see page 79), spread with ¼ cup of the warm icing. Repeat stacking and spreading with 8 more cake layers and 2 cups icing, leaving the last cake un-iced. Spread the remaining icing over the top and sides of the cake stack until smooth. (If the icing hardens in the pan while you're icing the cake, rewarm it over low heat until it loosens before continuing.) Let the cake stand until the icing sets before serving. Store the cake, wrapped in plastic wrap, at room temperature for up to 3 days or in the refrigerator for 1 week.

New Orleans Doberge Cake

Serves 12 to 16
Active: 2 hr. 40 min.; Total: 15 hr.

This New Orleans-style cake, a cousin of Hungary's Dobos torte, came to the United States in the 1930s and was transformed into doberge (pronounced DOH-bash) cake. Chef Kelly Fields of



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Willa Jean in New Orleans encases her mammoth creation in rich vanilla butter-cream and creamy chocolate ganache.

For the chocolate filling:

- 1/4 cup sugar**
- 1 Tbsp. plus 1 tsp. cornstarch**
- 1 Tbsp. cocoa powder**
- 1 tsp. kosher salt**
- 1 large egg**
- 3/4 cup heavy cream**
- 3/4 cup whole milk**
- 1/2 vanilla bean, split and seeds scraped**
- 4 oz. 70 percent dark chocolate, finely chopped**
- 2 Tbsp. unsalted butter, cubed**

For the lemon curd filling:

- 1/2 cup (3 1/2 oz.) sugar**
- 1/2 tsp. kosher salt**
- 3 large eggs plus 4 egg yolks**
- 1/2 cup fresh lemon juice**
- 1/4 cup finely grated lemon zest**
- 4 Tbsp. unsalted butter, cubed**

For the German buttercream:

- 1/2 cup plus 2 Tbsp. (4 oz.) sugar**
- 1 1/2 Tbsp. cornstarch**
- 1 large egg plus 1 egg yolk**
- 1/2 vanilla bean, split and seeds scraped**
- 1 cup whole milk**
- 1 lb. (4 sticks) unsalted butter, softened**

For the cake and simple syrup:

- 3 1/2 cups (1 lb. 1/4 oz.) cake flour**
- 2 Tbsp. baking powder**
- 1 cup buttermilk**
- 1 Tbsp. sour cream**
- 1 tsp. vanilla extract**
- 3 cups (1 lb. 6 1/2 oz.) sugar**
- 12 Tbsp. unsalted butter, softened**
- 3/4 tsp. kosher salt**
- 1 tsp. finely grated lemon zest**
- 4 large eggs, separated**

For the chocolate ganache:

- 12 oz. 70 percent dark chocolate, finely chopped**
- 1 1/2 cups heavy cream**
- 1/2 tsp. kosher salt**

1 Make the chocolate filling: In a medium heavy-bottomed saucepan, whisk the sugar with the cornstarch, cocoa powder, and salt. Whisk in the egg until smooth, then whisk in the cream, milk, and vanilla seeds. Place the pan over medium heat and cook, stirring constantly, until the filling thickens to the consistency of loose pudding, 8 to 10 minutes. Remove the pan from the heat and stir in the chocolate and butter until smooth. Scrape the filling through a fine sieve into a bowl. Press a sheet of plastic wrap directly onto the surface of the filling and refrigerate until chilled and thickened, at least 4 hours.

2 Make the lemon curd filling: In a medium heavy-bottomed saucepan, whisk the sugar with the salt, eggs, and yolks until smooth, then whisk in the lemon juice and zest. Place the pan over medium heat and cook, stirring constantly, until the filling thickens to the consistency of loose pudding, about 5 minutes. Remove the pan from the heat and stir in the butter until smooth. Scrape the filling through a fine sieve into a bowl. Press a sheet of plastic wrap directly onto the surface of the filling and refrigerate until chilled and thickened, at least 4 hours.

3 Make the German buttercream: In a small heavy-bottomed saucepan, whisk the sugar with the cornstarch, egg and yolk, and vanilla seeds until smooth, then whisk in the milk. Place the pan over medium heat and cook, stirring constantly, until the mixture thickens to the consistency of loose pudding, 6 to 8 minutes. Remove the pan from the heat and scrape the pudding through a fine sieve into a bowl. Press a sheet of plastic wrap directly onto the surface of the pudding and refrigerate until chilled and thickened, at least 2 hours.

4 Scrape the pudding into the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with a paddle and turn the mixer on to medium speed. Add 1 tablespoon of the butter and let the butter disappear into the pudding before adding another tablespoon. Repeat adding butter in this manner until the buttercream is smooth, pale, and fluffy, about 8 minutes from start to finish. (The buttercream will look curdled at first, but will smooth out by the time the last of the butter is added.) Scrape the buttercream into a bowl and cover with plastic wrap. If not using right away, refrigerate the buttercream for up to 5 days. Allow it to return to room temperature and beat it again in the stand mixer until fluffy before using.

5 Make the cake layers: Heat the oven to 375°. Line three 9-inch round cake pans with parchment paper circles and spray with nonstick baking spray (see page 79). Sift the cake flour into a large bowl, then whisk in the baking powder. In a liquid measuring cup, whisk the buttermilk with the sour cream and vanilla until smooth. In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with a paddle, cream 2 cups sugar with the butter and salt on medium speed until pale and fluffy, about 3 minutes. Add the lemon zest followed by the egg yolks, adding one at a time, beating well after each addition until smooth. Reduce the mixer speed to low and alternately add the dry ingredients in 3 batches and the wet ingredients in 2 batches, beginning and ending with the dry ingredients, and beat until the batter just comes together. Using a rubber spatula, stir the batter again until smooth then scrape

it into a large bowl. Clean and dry the bowl, return to the stand mixer, and fit with a whisk. Add the egg whites to the bowl and beat on medium-high speed until soft peaks form. Scrape the egg whites into the cake batter and gently fold until combined and smooth.

6 Divide the cake batter among the prepared cake pans and, using a small offset spatula, spread the batter evenly in each pan (see page 79). Bake the cakes, rotating the pans halfway through cooking, until lightly browned and a toothpick inserted in the middle of each comes out clean, 20 to 22 minutes. Transfer the pans to a rack and let the cakes cool completely, then invert the cakes onto the rack and remove the parchment paper. Once the cakes are completely cooled, use a serrated knife to halve each horizontally to produce 6 cake layers total. While the cakes cool, make the simple syrup: In a small saucepan, combine the remaining 1 cup sugar with 1 cup water and bring to a boil, stirring to dissolve the sugar. Boil the syrup for 5 minutes, then remove from the heat and let cool completely.

7 Assemble the cake: Using a pastry brush, brush each cake layer with some of the simple syrup, discarding any leftover syrup. Using a small offset spatula (see page 79), spread 3 cake layers each with one-third of the chocolate filling. Spread 2 cake layers each with half the lemon filling. Place 1 chocolate-covered cake layer on a cake stand, then quickly stack the remaining cake layers, alternating the lemon and chocolate fillings, and ending with the final, plain cake layer. Refrigerate the stacked cakes for 30 minutes. Using a small offset spatula spread the top and sides with the German buttercream until smooth. Place the cake in the freezer for 30 minutes.

8 While the cake is in the freezer, make the ganache: Place the chocolate in a medium bowl. In a small saucepan, heat the cream and salt over medium until it begins to bubble at the edges. Remove the pan from the heat, pour the hot cream over the chocolate, and let stand, undisturbed, for 1 minute. Whisk the chocolate and cream from the center until the ganache is smooth and shiny. Remove the cake from the freezer and slowly pour the ganache over the top of the cake, using the offset spatula to guide and spread it over the side, until the cake is completely coated in the ganache. (You can also let the ganache drip down the side of the cake and set naturally, if you like.) Let the cake stand for about 10 minutes to allow the ganache to set before serving. Store the cake, wrapped in plastic wrap, in the refrigerator for up to 1 week (allow it to return to room temperature before serving).



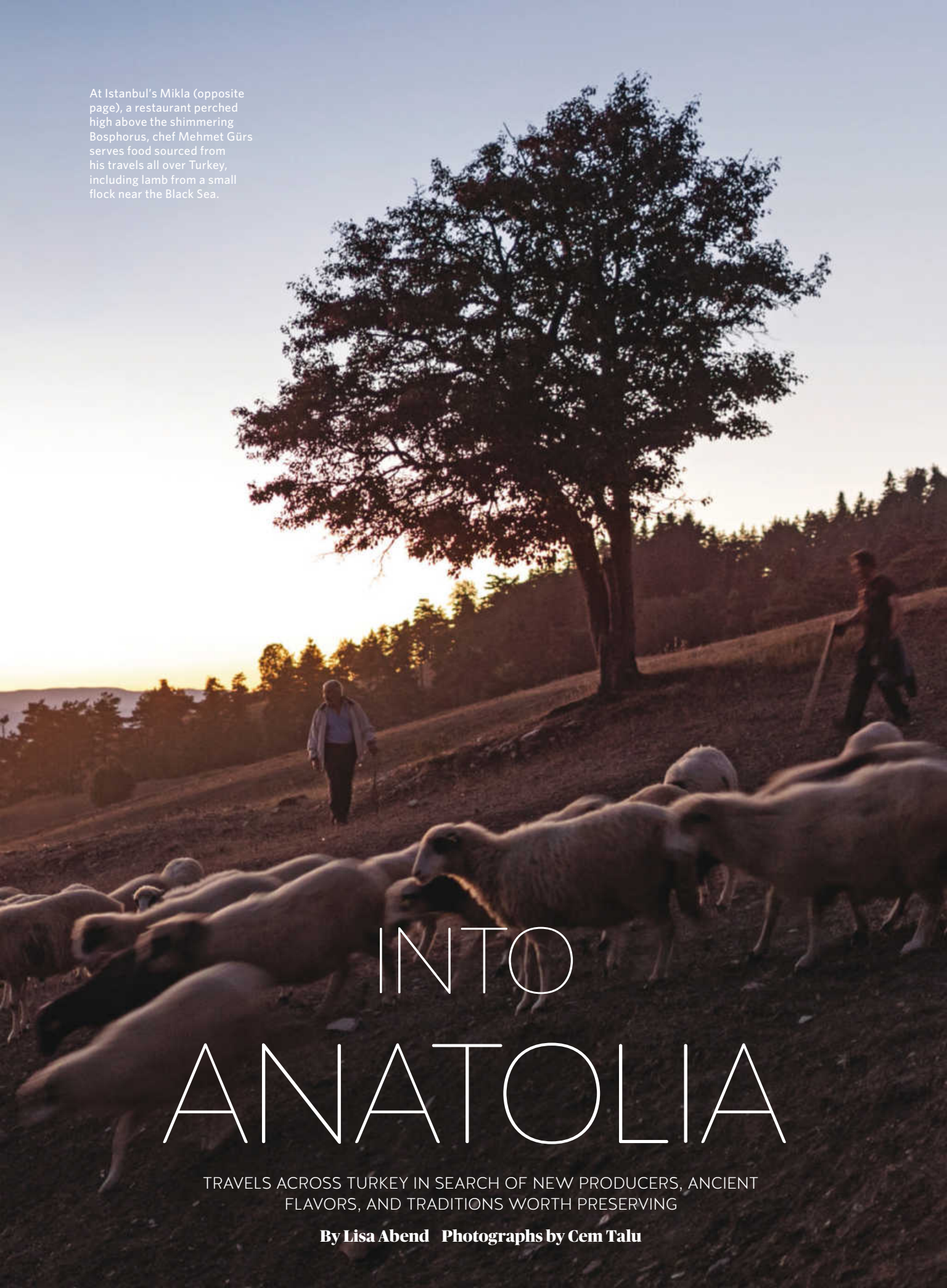
TWO NEW SAVEUR COOKBOOKS – TWO GREAT TAKES ON DELICIOUS COMFORT FOOD



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At Istanbul's Mikla (opposite page), a restaurant perched high above the shimmering Bosphorus, chef Mehmet Gürs serves food sourced from his travels all over Turkey, including lamb from a small flock near the Black Sea.



INTO ANATOLIA

TRAVELS ACROSS TURKEY IN SEARCH OF NEW PRODUCERS, ANCIENT
FLAVORS, AND TRADITIONS WORTH PRESERVING

By Lisa Abend Photographs by Cem Talu

There was never any question of what we would eat for dinner. The Yildirim family has been raising sheep for as long as anyone can remember, and lamb—roasted whole in a wood-burning oven, then served chopped to bits on communal plates—is how they greet every guest. But first, the animal would have to be killed. After a late breakfast of fire-baked flatbread and fresh cheese, the shepherd, Dursun Yildirim, led the animal into the dusty courtyard outside his home. He cradled it in his arms and stroked its neck so gently that, for a moment, it seemed as if he might pet it to death. But it was a knife that actually did the job, and it wasn't long before Yildirim had sheared the animal, removed its organs, and cleaned its entrails one by one. Finally, he got to the colon. Putting one end to his lips, Yildirim blew air into the tube, so that small round pellets of waste dropped out the other end in a pile. From the sidelines, Turkey's most renowned chef observed the ritual.

"Remind me not to kiss him," he muttered.

Mehmet Gürs seeks out what most chefs don't. He's found village women so accustomed to folding delicate, tortellini-like pasta called *manti* that their fingers move in a blur; located the baker in Gaziantep who makes baklava with pastry so thin you can read a newspaper through it; and, in this case, befriended a family living high up in the Canik mountains near the Black Sea that raises an indigenous breed of lamb Gürs thinks so good he has bought as much of the flock as he can. That day, we not only witnessed the butchering, but also watched the family's matriarch roll out a flat, layered bread that she cooked on a piece of curved iron over the fire, napped on the porch to avoid the worst of the day's heat, and later, kept the shepherd company when he and his dogs brought the flock home as the sky turned first purple, then black. And then we sat with the family and ate the lamb that, after the slaughter, had roasted in the outdoor oven all afternoon, with no more seasoning than its own skin. Despite the ample fat on it, the meat wasn't greasy—just mineral-tasting and rich.

Watching us attentively as we ate, the Yildirim clan swapped anecdotes, speaking as proudly about Dursun's daughter's hopes for university as about his grandfather's exploits during the Greco-Turkish War. It occurred to me then what made Gürs so exceptional. It may be commonplace these days for chefs to talk about the stories behind their ingredients, about how knowing the narrative behind a dish can make diners appreciate it more. But how

many actually travel to the source of those stories? How many become part of the narrative themselves?

GÜRS IS THE LEADING CRUSADER for Turkey's traditional foodways, and has offered a lifeline to ingredients—and their producers—in danger of disappearing. Yet he is less interested in mere preservation than in transformation, and his dedication to his culinary heritage is made all the more striking by the fact that his chief establishment, Mikla, is not some rustic outpost or culinary museum devoted to preserving the past, but an elegant restaurant whose creative take on the cuisine of Anatolia—the ancients' word for this part of the world—draws the most glamorous of Istanbul's denizens. Gürs himself is a walking contradiction: a tall, blue-eyed product of a Finnish mother and Turkish father, who grew up in chilly Stockholm but lives in the seemingly opposite—in both temperature and temperament—land of his paternal relatives.

Anatolian cuisine is a bountiful hodgepodge. It builds on the key ingredients of the Middle East—yogurt, olive oil, bulgur, lamb—with a Mediterranean jolt of fish and fresh vegetables, sharp sheep's milk cheese and juicy pomegranates, and then throws in its very own palate-tingling punch of cardamom, cinnamon, and nutmeg. The long reign of the Ottomans, with their luxurious palace cuisine, added complex flavors and sophisticated techniques, and elegantly fused the savory and sweet. And the Greeks, Sephardic Jews, Kurds, and Syrians all contributed too.

Before Gürs and I left for the mountains, I had spent a couple of days in Istanbul, and even



in that short while had discovered an astounding array of tastes in an astounding array of places. To wit: the market in Kadıköy, where fishmongers pull the gills out of the glistening mullet on display, so that the fish look as though they're bedecked with scarlet carnations; a restaurant in Karaköy where the geometrically tiled floors are either grandmotherly old-fashioned or cutting-edge chic, and where the menu is made up of only the luscious, olive oil-poached vegetables called *zeytinyağlı*; a jewel box of a candy shop in Beşiktaş that sells the most almondy marzipan I've ever eaten; an overlit, Formica-tabled place that hawks perfect, almost-crisp flatbreads called *lahmacun* that come topped with the thinnest smear of spicy ground lamb; the docks down by the Bosphorus where guys grill mackerel, top it with a lemony tomato salad, and stuff the whole thing into a hunk of baguette for the best fish sandwich ever.

And yet where I see diversity and lusciousness, Gürs sees

Clockwise from top: Members of the Yildirim family; Hüseyin and Kezban Genç, vinegar producers from the village of Doğanbey; koftas, meatballs (see page 52 for recipe). Opposite: Mehmet Gürs in the kitchen at Mikla.



GÜRS' COOKING
TRANSFORMS THE
RECOGNIZABLE
FLAVORS OF
ANATOLIA INTO
SOMETHING
MODERN, EXCITING

Mikla's braised lamb—
pictured here with smoky
puréed eggplant, freekeh
pilaf, and tomato-braised
greens—comes from a
flock Gürs purchased high
up in the Canik mountains
after he befriended a
shepherding family. Reci-
pes begin on page 49.



loss. That towering display of precisely diamonded baklava? Made with cheap glucose syrup instead of real honey. The table-bending array of seafood meze dishes we attempt to plow through one night featuring *lakerda*, a cured slice of bonito? It wasn't as velvety as it should be, thanks to an insufficiently slow salt cure. And that waterside fish sandwich? The bland mackerel was shipped frozen from far-off Norway, not caught in Mediterranean waters. And the bread, *well, you call that bread?*

Gürs first visited Turkey when he was 15, but only returned permanently years later, and he began his career cooking the kind of upscale but rootless European food that still gets served in many of Istanbul's fine dining restaurants. When Gürs opened Mikla in 2005, it was a nice if unexciting luxury restaurant heavy on the caviar. But he found himself drawn to the high-tech experimentation going on in Spain and, because of his personal background, to the terroir-based cooking emerging out of Scandinavia. He didn't want to just copy those trends. Rather, he was after something that felt genuine to him, food that had something to say about Turkey itself.

But so much of what made Turkish food unique—its ancient artisanal practices, its carefully tended ingredients, its very diversity—had been lost under a kind of dull, unifying blanket of “Turkishness” that anyone who has ever scarfed an uninspired late-night döner kebab knows well. And so it occurred to him that if his Nordic colleagues had gone looking for an authentic cuisine in the wild flora and fauna of Scandinavia, he might be able to find his in the deep-rooted but often forgotten idiosyncrasies of Anatolia. The trick would be finding a way not merely to preserve the past, but to be inspired by it as well—to take it someplace new. “I kept coming back to this question of how we could respect and showcase the work of our ancestors, but not be crushed by their traditions,” he says.

The answer came in the form of a bearded young anthropologist, with the beatific smile and rounded belly of Buddha. Tangör Tan was a line cook when he started studying for his PhD at the University of Gastronomic Sciences in Bra, Italy. Impressed by his knowledge and sensitivity, Gürs hired him before he had really figured out what to do with him.

“One day, I just said to him, ‘Here’s a car. Go somewhere, see what you can find,’” remembers Gürs. It took a while for Tan to get the hang of things, but after about a year, he began finding extraordinary products that the restaurant could showcase. Eventually, those individual products cohered into an emphasis on cultural terroir that would transform Mikla from a fancy restaurant with a nice view into ground zero for the development of a creative Turkish cuisine.

THE DAY AFTER OUR LAMB FEAST, Tan wants Gürs to meet Hüseyin Genç, a guy who makes vinegar in a room off his kitchen. To get there, we leave the Yildirim family and drive for hours to the parched moonscape outside Çankiri, 300 miles east of Istanbul. Finally, we arrive at a ridge of caramel-colored mountains covered with what look to be patches of snow, though the oppressive heat makes this impossible. Genç is waiting for us there beside a dry white riverbed.

“It’s salt,” he says. “They say there are galleries of it from here all the way to the Himalayas.” We reach for a taste of it, and sure enough: clean, but intensely salty. You can practically see the wheels of Gürs’ mind turn as he asks questions. Would it be possible to get blocks of the salt to the restaurant to use as plates? How would they be harvested and transported? But just as quickly, he is worrying about sustainability. “If we start doing it, others will too.” He looks off in the distance. “And then what? Is there enough? Are we going to ruin this place without meaning to?”

It’s the kind of complication Gürs has become used to considering. After all, most of the producers he and Tan discover are accustomed to working on a very small scale, and in virtual isolation; to suddenly begin supplying the most

Lamb Shanks in Red Wine with Creamy Eggplant

Serves 6; 📖 Page 48

Active: 1 hr. 50 min.; Total: 5 ½ hr.

Chef Mehmet Gürs’ lamb shanks are accompanied by an eggplant purée that has the unexpected—for Turkey, at least—addition of béchamel and Gruyère cheese, a nod to his classic European training.

- ¼ cup olive oil
- 6 lamb shanks (about 4 ½ lbs.)
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
- ½ tsp. whole black peppercorns
- 3 celery stalks, minced
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 2 rosemary sprigs
- 2 thyme sprigs
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 medium yellow onion, minced
- 5 Tbsp. tomato paste
- 2 cups red wine
- One 1-lb. eggplant
- 2 Tbsp. unsalted butter
- 3 Tbsp. all-purpose flour
- ½ cup whole milk
- ¼ cup grated Gruyère
- Freshly grated nutmeg

1 In an 8-qt. saucepan, heat the olive oil over medium-high. Season the lamb shanks with salt and pepper and, working in batches, add to the pot and cook, turning as needed, until golden brown, about 10 minutes. Transfer the shanks to a plate. Add the peppercorns, celery, garlic, rosemary, thyme, bay leaf, and onion to the pot and cook, stirring, until the vegetables begin to brown, about 10 minutes. Stir in the tomato paste and cook until lightly caramelized, 2 to 3 minutes. Pour in the red wine, bring to a boil, and cook until reduced by half, 4 to 5 minutes. Return the shanks to the pot along with 4 cups water and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat to maintain a gentle simmer and cook, covered, until the lamb is very tender, 2 ½ to 3 hours.

2 Meanwhile, heat the broiler. Using a fork, pierce the eggplant all over, place on a foil-lined baking sheet, and broil, rotating as needed, until the skin blackens and the flesh is tender, 18 to 20 minutes. Peel off and discard the charred skin and discard the seeds. Purée the flesh until smooth.

3 In a small saucepan, melt the butter over medium-low heat. Add the flour and cook, whisking, for 2 minutes. Pour in the milk, bring to a boil while whisking, and cook, until the sauce thickens, 2 to 3 minutes. Remove the pan from the heat and stir in the eggplant purée and Gruyère

recognized restaurant in Turkey can have a big impact on their lives and the environment they work in. Take Genç, for example. We follow him from the salt road to a home that is as much garden as it is house. A table is set beneath the cherry trees, and we fall on a lunch as simple as it is vibrant: home-baked bread, fresh sheep's milk cheese and honey, sliced tomatoes, and roasted peppers and eggplant. Genç used to work for the government buying fertilizers, of all things, but was always interested in making his own vinegar. After he retired, he turned his focus more fully to his passion and started producing his own.

Not long after that he met Tan, who spent a day with Genç and his wife, Kezban, watching them work, listening to their story, and occasionally suggesting improvements, like using wooden barrels instead of the steel Genç first employed.

"The amazing thing about him," Gürs says of Tan, "is that he can fit in totally. And he's so clearly interested in what other people are doing that they open up to him."

After lunch, Genç leads us indoors to show us around his kitchen annex vinegar distillery. Dipping a spoon into an elongated barrel, Gürs samples a bit of the apple, then the pear, then the sour cherry—all of them made from fruit the Gençs grow themselves. Excitement blossoms across the chef's face. "We just met, but I'm already getting ideas for other kinds of vinegar. We'll help them expand, put in a whole wall of barrels here"—he sweeps his arm across the outer wall—"and then we'll get his vinegar in at Mikla, and we'll do something extraordinary with it." Genç nods in cheerful agreement with the planned reconstruction of his home, happy to receive recognition for what is clearly a labor of love. In celebration, he opens a jar of homemade pickles and passes them around; flavored with garlic and wild celery, they are bright, tart, excellent.

TWO NIGHTS LATER, GÜRS AND I DINE outdoors on the balcony at Mikla. The meal starts with one of the restaurant's signature dishes, a crisp, buttery toast miraculously laminated with a meaty grilled anchovy. "You've had the fish sandwich they sell by the Galata bridge, right?" he asks. "When I was young it was the fishermen themselves who would pull up to sell them. They had grills in their boats, and you would step onboard. You'd be wobbling as you ate it, but it was so good, so fresh—the best fast food. So I wanted to do something that was a tribute to that."

Like his take on that fish sandwich, much of Gürs' cooking transforms the recognizable flavors of Anatolia—the tang of citrus and pickled vegetables; the richness of fresh nuts and olives; the earthiness of bulgur and lamb—into something modern and exciting. As we eat our way through dishes that highlight his and Tan's finds—a voluptuous soup made with raw buffalo milk yogurt, an impossibly delicate *manti*—Gürs tells me about his first Turkish coffee, the tiny cup poured from a long-handled copper *cevze*, and how years later, after a mind-blowing cup of coffee at Copenhagen's Noma, he was spurred to open his own coffee roaster and shops, called Kronotrop. There, amid international coffee juggernauts like Starbucks, the baristas teach Turks themselves that good Turkish coffee can be floral and nuanced, that it is often better than its European counterparts—it was, after all, Turkey that introduced coffee to the continent.

Except for the illuminated minarets of Istanbul's many mosques along the shore, it is dark by the time we get to the final savory course. With its accompanying quenelle of plum fruit leather and smear of smoked, charred eggplant, this tender lamb shank is a million miles from the heaping platter of flesh and fat and gristle we ate with our hands back with the shepherd's family near the Black Sea. Yet in its richness, I'm reminded that both sheep shared a flock. I take another bite, and watch the twinkling lights of ships from that same sea slowly ply their way through the ancient Bosphorus below. ■

until smooth. Season the sauce with salt, pepper, and nutmeg and scrape into a bowl.

4 Uncover the lamb, arrange the shanks on a serving platter, and keep warm. Bring the sauce to a boil and cook until reduced to 1½ cups, about 30 minutes. Pour the sauce through a fine sieve into a bowl and discard the solids. Spoon the sauce over the shanks and serve with the eggplant sauce.

Chilled Yogurt and Chickpea Soup (Ayran Aşı)

Serves 4 to 6; 📖 Page 51

Active: 25 min.; Total: 3 hr.

Mehmet Gürs adds heaps of fresh parsley and mint to his yogurt soup for a bright flavor and a shot of color. For the most authentic taste, search for buffalo milk yogurt, which has a welcome undertone of funk—but in a pinch, plain yogurt will do.

- Kosher salt
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup green lentils
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup wheat berries
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup dried black-eyed peas
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup dried chickpeas
- 4** cups plain, full-fat yogurt, preferably made with buffalo milk or goats' milk
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup thinly shredded flat-leaf parsley leaves
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup thinly shredded mint leaves
- Freshly ground black pepper

1 In 4 separate bowls, soak the lentils, wheat berries, black-eyed peas, and chickpeas in water overnight, then drain. In a large saucepan of boiling, salted water, add the wheat berries and cook for 15 minutes. Add the lentils and chickpeas and continue cooking for 10 minutes. Add the black-eyed peas, and continue cooking until all the grains and beans are tender, about 15 minutes more. Drain the grains and beans, transfer to a bowl, and let cool.

2 Stir the yogurt, two-thirds each of the parsley and mint, and 2 cups ice-cold water into the grains and beans and season with salt and pepper. Cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate for at least 2 hours. Serve the soup chilled and garnished with the remaining mint and parsley.

Freekeh Pilaf with Sumac

Serves 4 to 6; 📖 Page 48

Active: 30 min.; Total: 2 hr.

Freekeh—sun-dried and roasted unripe wheat berries—is a popular grain in Mediterranean cuisines, and has a mildly smoky



Clockwise from top left:
chilled yogurt soup (see
page 50 for recipe); Nefise
Yildirim; a mountain range
300 miles from Istanbul,
near Çankiri, where patches
of salt baked onto the
terrain look like snow.

flavor and pleasant chew. Here, Mehmet Gürs cooks it pilaf-style and spices it with sumac, a bright red spice that lends color and a lemony zing to anything it hits. You can find freekeh where alternative grains are sold or at amazon.com.

- 1/2 cup olive oil
- 1 small yellow onion, finely chopped
- 1 1/2 cups whole freekeh (see note, above)
- 2/3 cup canned tomato purée
- 2 vine-ripe tomatoes, cored, peeled, and finely chopped
- 1 tsp. sumac, plus more to garnish
- Kosher salt and freshly ground white pepper

In a 4-qt. saucepan, heat the olive oil over medium-high. Add the onion and cook, stirring, until soft, about 6 minutes. Add the freekeh and cook, stirring, until lightly toasted, about 5 minutes. Pour in the tomato purée, vine-ripe tomatoes, and 2 cups water and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat to maintain a gentle simmer and cook, covered, until the freekeh is tender, about 1 1/2 hours. Remove the pan from the heat, stir in the sumac, and season with salt and pepper. Spoon the pilaf into a bowl and sprinkle with more sumac before serving.

Skillet-Braised Swiss Chard

Serves 4 to 6; 📖 Page 48
Active: 25 min.; Total: 45 min.

At his restaurant, Mikla, in Istanbul, chef Mehmet Gürs opts for foraged, wild greens when possible—in the case of this side dish, usually wild cabbage. We substitute Swiss chard, but you can also use bok choy, kale, or even green or purple cabbage, cored and cut into 1-inch-thick wedges.



- 1/2 cup olive oil
- 1 1/4 lbs. (2 bunches) Swiss chard, trimmed and halved crosswise
- 2 large shallots, peeled and finely chopped
- 2 small carrots, peeled and finely chopped
- 1 cup canned crushed tomatoes
- 2 tsp. sugar
- Kosher salt and freshly ground white pepper

Heat the olive oil in a 12-inch high-sided skillet over medium. Add the Swiss chard and sprinkle with the shallots and carrots. Pour the tomatoes evenly over the chard, sprinkle with the sugar, and season with salt and pepper. Pour in 1/2 cup water, bring to a simmer, then cover partially with a lid. Cook until the liquid is almost evaporated and the chard is tender, 15 to 20 minutes. Uncover, transfer the chard to a platter, and pour the vegetables and any cooking liquid over the top before serving.

Black Mulberry Soup with Kaymak Ice Cream

Serves 6
Active: 45 min.; Total: 3 1/2 hr.

When it comes to dessert, this pleasantly tart soup from Mehmet Gürs is a welcome break from super-sweet, honey-soaked Turkish pastries. The ice cream served in the soup is enriched with *kaymak*, a clot- ted-cream-style dairy product traditional in Turkey.

- 2 cups whole milk
- 1/2 cup kaymak (see page 78)
- 1/4 cup honey
- 1 1/2 tsp. unflavored powdered gelatin
- cup plus 2 Tbsp. (1 3/4 oz.) coarse almond meal
- 1/4 cup all-purpose flour
- 4 1/2 Tbsp. unsalted butter, melted
- 1/2 tsp. ground cinnamon
- 1 3/4 lbs. black mulberries or blackberries
- 1/3 cup sweet white wine, such as Riesling
- 2 1/2 Tbsp. sugar
- 1 tsp. black raspberry liqueur, such as Chambord

1 In a small saucepan, heat 1 3/4 cups milk with the kaymak and honey over medium-high. Meanwhile, in a small bowl, soak the gelatin in the remaining 1/4 cup milk for 5 minutes. Scrape the gelatin into the warm milk mixture and stir until it dissolves. Pour the milk mixture into a bowl and let cool completely. Pour the cooled milk mixture in an ice cream machine and process according to the manufacturer's instruc-

tions. Scrape the ice cream into a container, cover, and freeze for at least 2 hours.

2 Heat the oven to 350°. In a medium bowl, combine the almond meal with the flour, 4 tablespoons butter, and the cinnamon and rub with your fingers until evenly combined. Spread the crumbs onto a parchment paper-lined baking sheet and bake until golden brown, about 15 minutes. Transfer the baking sheet to a rack and let the almond crumbs cool.

3 In a medium saucepan, combine the mulberries with the wine and sugar and bring to a simmer over medium heat. Cook, stirring, until the berries break down and the sugar dissolves, about 5 minutes. Scrape the berries into a blender and purée until smooth. Pour the purée through a fine sieve into a bowl and discard the solids. Stir in the remaining 1/2 tablespoon butter and the liqueur and ladle the soup into serving bowls. Sprinkle the center of each soup with some of the almond crumbs, then place a scoop of the kaymak ice cream over the crumbs to serve.

Beef and Lamb Koftas with Mustard

Makes 20 meatballs; 📖 Page 47
Total: 30 min.

The word *kofta* comes from the Persian *koofteh*, which means "pounded meat," and these meatballs have been eaten for hundreds of years—the earliest written recipe dates to ancient Arabic cookbooks. Mehmet Gürs serves them simply with mustard.

- 1 lb. ground beef
- 10 oz. ground lamb
- 3/4 cup plain bread crumbs
- 1/3 cup minced red onion
- 2 1/2 Tbsp. finely chopped flat-leaf parsley
- 1 Tbsp. plus 2 tsp. kosher salt
- 1 Tbsp. plus 1/4 tsp. ground cumin
- 2 1/2 tsp. dried thyme
- 2 tsp. freshly ground black pepper
- Coarse-grain mustard, for serving

1 In a large bowl, mix the beef and lamb with the bread crumbs, red onion, parsley, salt, cumin, thyme, and pepper. Using your hands, mix until evenly combined. Divide the meat mixture into 20 pieces, roll each into a ball, and flatten each slightly into a 3/4-inch-thick patty.

2 Light a grill or heat a cast-iron grill pan over medium-high. Place the patties on the grill and cook, flipping once, until browned and cooked to medium, about 10 minutes. Serve the grilled kofta while hot with the mustard.

Travel Guide

ISTANBUL

WHERE TO STAY

Hotel Empress Zoe

The 25 rooms of this exquisitely designed hotel are spread across five townhouses built around a 15th-century garden near Topkapı Palace. Each is decorated with indigenous textiles and Islamic folk art. *Akbiyik Cd. No. 10; emzoe.com*

Hotel Marmara Pera

Located just off bustling İstiklal Street, this high-rise hotel has spectacular views of the Bosphorus and is host to Mehmet Gürs' Mikla restaurant. There's also a very happening outdoor cocktail bar on the top floor. *Meşrutiyet Cd. Tepebasi, 34430; pera.themarmarahotels.com*

WHERE TO EAT AND DRINK

Çiya

Whether they're locals or visitors, everyone's favorite

kebab place is actually three restaurants, all crowded on a single block near the Kadıköy fish market. The menus are the result of deep research into the geographic and historical varieties of Turkish cuisine, and are full of unusual—and unusually delicious—dishes like roast borage and sour kebabs with pomegranate juice. *Caferağa Mah. Güneşlibahçe Sk. 48 B; ciya.com.tr*

Halil Lahmacun

The atmosphere at this joint that hawks just a handful of items may be all Formica tables and bad lighting, but the *lahmacun*, with its delicate crust and spicy smear of ground lamb, is among Istanbul's best. The *pide*—its chewy, boat-shaped dough filled with cheese and tomatoes—also has the power to make you completely forget about pizza. *Caferağa Mah. Güneşlibahçe Sok. No. 26, 34710*

Karaköy Lokantasi

With its patterned tile floors and deep blue walls, this family-run restaurant draws a noticeably hip clientele. At lunch, the menu is crowded with delicious interpretations of the olive oil-braised dishes called *zeytinyağlı*, like stewed artichokes or white beans in tomato. At night, it turns into a *meyhane*, or pub, specializing in small plates called *meze*. *Kemankeş Cd. No. 37 A; karakoylokantasi.com*

Kronotrop

With three locations in Istanbul and an arsenal of Chemexes, espresso machines, and Aeropresses, Gürs' urbane coffee shops look like they could be located in any bean-obsessed city from Portland to Melbourne. What distinguishes these is not just their own roaster, but their Turkish coffee, which, while clinging closely to the traditional method, never-

theless allows the sweet, subtle flavors of the coffee to come through. *Kuloğlu Mh., Firuzağa Cami Sk. 2 B, 34433; kronotrop.com.tr*

Mikla

The rooftop restaurant that disproves the commonly held notion about restaurants with views, Gürs offers a menu that makes creative and elegant use of the products and techniques he and his team have sourced throughout Turkey and serves it in a setting incredibly freighted with beauty and history. *Hotel Marmara Pera, Meşrutiyet Cd. No. 15, 34430; miklarestaurant.com*

WHAT TO SEE

The Spice Bazaar

Also known as the Egyptian market, and located by the New Mosque, the 85 shops here are a wonderland of coffee, dried fruit, Turkish delights, and, of course, spices. *Çiçek Pazarı and Tahmis streets, Eminönü quarter, Fatih district*

The streets and domes of Istanbul. Opposite: mulberry soup with kaymak ice cream (see page 52 for recipe).

SONOKO DREAMS OF SOBA



BUCKWHEAT NOODLES ARE BEAUTIFUL—
AND HARD TO MASTER

By Francis Lam
Photographs by Dylan + Jeni



Unlike Japanese udon or ramen noodles, which are often served in robust broths with heaps of other ingredients, delicate soba noodles are typically eaten cold with a simple dipping sauce, like the mushroom one here (see page 62 for recipe).

I had the first line of this story written
before I even got out of the car.
“Dogs smell your fear,” it said at the top of my notebook.
“But soba smells your anxiety.”

I'd been snarled in L.A. traffic, late on my way to meet Sonoko Sakai, the woman waiting to show me the way of soba, but there was one thing I already knew about the meditative culture of Japanese noodle making: Stressed out and road-ragey is not the way of soba. If ramen is the pork-fat shock-and-awe of the noodle world, soba is what philosophers slurp—a simple buckwheat noodle, a cuisine of purity and contemplation. A soba restaurant's menu may include a tray of noodles served with tempura, or maybe a tangle bathed in a lean, coffee-dark duck broth, as austere as duck gets. But always, there will be an offering of plain soba, just-cooked, chilled cold, served with only a small cup of seasoned stock for dipping. It's completely fireworks-free, but in simple things lie complex pleasures, if you choose to discover them, which is why you often find this most naked of dishes offered as a course on its own in refined *kaiseki* tasting menus. Slip a few strands between your chopsticks and dip them—ideally no more than a third of their length, to really taste the noodle. Slurp them up, feeling the way they glide toward you; the Japanese have a word for what you're looking for—*nodogoshi*, which means “good throat-feel.” Chew, and think about their texture—how firm, or yielding, or firm-but-yielding. Take in their flavor—do they taste nutty and earthy or round and mild, like buckwheat or wheat? Do this over and over, learning to notice the unnoticed: how evenly the master cut each strand; how much sauce clings to them; how the noodles change from day to day, season to season, as the flour ages and new crops replace old.

Buckwheat is second only to rice as the traditional grain of the Japanese diet; the word soba means both “buckwheat” and “noodle,” so it is the foundational pasta of Japanese cuisine. It is a craft perfected through meditative union between dough and maker, and an art when there is an eater to receive and make sense of it.

So I knew how my time with Sakai was supposed to go: I'd get a crash course in soba making and maybe find it surprisingly easy, at least until I got a little better and realized how little I actually knew. I'd understand that the masters adjust their dough according to the humidity in the air, according to the variety of buckwheat, according to the grind of the flour, probably according to the song of the birds in the wisteria above. I'd fall into a trance while rolling out the sheets, while cutting the noodles. I'd learn to make better soba, and making better soba would make me a better person: more present, more grounded. This

was going to be a story of losing myself in the particulars, of mindfulness and detail and learning to see how big the world is by learning to see its smallest alchemies. I've seen *Jiro Dreams of Sushi*. That's how Japanese food is supposed to work.

finally arrived at Sakai's sunbaked olive house, and she greeted me with her wide, smiling face, a scarf tied around her head, prepared for work. “My house is a little buckwheat monastery,” she said as she led me through its airy rooms: blond woods and cool, angular surfaces displaying little more than a book here, a book there, some pieces of art by her husband, Katsuhisa. I went to wash my hands in the bathroom and struggled to find the mirror.

“Soba saved me,” she said. A movie buyer and producer raised in New York, Mexico, and Japan, Sakai lived a big life in the presence of stars. But seven years ago, she finished producing a difficult film, one that burned her out, and she took more and more satisfaction in learning about noodles on her business trips to Japan. The day Sakai thought it would be a good idea to leave her clothes behind and fill her luggage with buckwheat flour was the day she knew her life had changed. “I stripped everything out of my life that I didn't need.” Now she teaches the meditation of noodle making. “I like the scale of making food,” she said, and so she committed herself to the intimacy, the humanness, the smallness of a simple craft that you make, serve, and watch disappear over and over again.

Talking with her, you're immediately impressed with how centered, how balanced, she seems. In her studio, a plain room with a work table and two windows letting in lemonade light, she showed me some of her flours: this one American, by Anson Mills, with rustic shards of husk; this one Canadian; this one Japanese, milled at an impossibly slow pace of two kilos an hour to make a flour so fine, so heavy, it feels like cream when you put your hands in it. That Japanese flour, she said, makes supremely supple and refined noodles, but America actually grows far more buckwheat than Japan. Farmers here usually plant it as a cover crop, essentially a by-product, harvested and stored carelessly since there is little domestic market for it.

She stirred some flours in a massive lacquered bowl, its black expanse as wide as her arms could stretch around. Mostly she makes soba in the *ni-hachi* style, which usually means that it's roughly 20 percent wheat and 80 percent buckwheat. For soba lovers, the higher (*continued on page 60*)



Clockwise from top left: Sonoko Sakai kneading soba dough in her Los Angeles studio; the *kikuneru*, or chrysanthemum fold; soba tools, including a flour sifter and a special knife for cutting and scooping the noodles; hot soba with chicken and egg (see page 62 for recipe).



Technically, you can roll
soba noodles through a
pasta machine, but true
soba aficionados knead the
dough and cut the noodles
by hand. As Sakai explains,
“connecting with your
hands is the point.”



HOW TO MAKE FRESH SOBA NOODLES AT HOME



In a large bowl, whisk 10 oz. (2 ½ cups) light buckwheat flour (not whole-grain) and 2 ½ oz. (½ cup) all-purpose flour until evenly combined. Pour ¾ cup lukewarm water over the flours and, using your fingers, toss and rub the flours with the water until crumbly, like muddy sand.



Scrape the dough onto a work surface and press and knead until smooth, about 6 minutes. Press the dough into a disk, then rotate the disk clockwise as you pinch portions of the dough on top of the disk and fold them over in a counterclockwise motion to form pleats.



Arrange the dough pleated-side-down and mold into a cone. Flatten the dough around its perimeter until it is ½-inch thick, keeping a slight bump in the center of the disk. Transfer the dough to a work surface dusted lightly with tapioca starch and lightly dust the dough with starch.



Using a thin rolling pin or wooden dowel dusted with more starch, roll the dough using back-and-forth strokes, rotating it as needed. (You can also use a pasta machine for this task by cutting the disk into quarters and feeding each through the machine on its thinnest setting.)



Once the dough is flattened to ⅛-inch thick (you can roll the dough around the rolling pin to check for even thickness), dust the flattened dough generously with starch and fold in half. Dust the sheet with more starch and fold it again in the same direction to make four layers.



Using a sharp slicing knife, slice the dough into ⅛-inch-thick noodles and toss in the starch to ensure they don't stick together. Use the cut soba noodles immediately or transfer to a parchment paper-lined baking sheet, cover with plastic wrap, and refrigerate for up to 3 days. Makes 1 lb.

Soba Noodles with Two Dipping Sauces

Serves 6
Total: 30 min.

In this preparation, cold soba noodles are eaten with two dipping sauces: one made of dashi and the other a homemade, lightly sweetened walnut paste. If you want to go the traditional route, pick up a set of flat bamboo colanders, available at hitachiya.com, to serve the noodles on, allowing them to drain as they sit.

- 1 cup (4 ½ oz.) walnuts, finely chopped**
- 2 tsp. sugar**

- 2 ¼ cups Dashi Stock (see page 78 for recipe), chilled**
- ¾ cup Noodle Sauce Base (see page 78 for recipe), chilled**
- 6 oz. daikon radish, peeled and grated with a Microplane**
- 1 oz. freshly grated wasabi or paste**
- 6 scallions, thinly sliced crosswise**
- 12 oz. Fresh Soba Noodles (see above for recipe) or dried noodles**

1 In a small food processor or mortar and pestle, grind the walnuts with the sugar until they form a smooth paste and divide the walnut paste among 6 small ramekins.

2 In a small bowl, stir the dashi with the sauce base and divide the dipping sauce

among 6 more small ramekins. Divide the grated radish, wasabi, and scallions among 6 plates, keeping each in its own separate pile.

3 In a large pot of boiling water, cook the soba noodles until al dente, about 3 minutes. Drain the noodles into a colander, submerge the colander in a bowl of ice water, and then drain and rinse the noodles under cold running water until the water runs clear. Submerge the noodles again in the bowl of ice water, drain, and then divide the noodles among the 6 serving plates. Serve the noodles immediately with the dipping sauces, grated radish, wasabi, and scallions.

(continued from page 56) the buckwheat percentage, the truer the flavor, but since buckwheat is gluten-free, most noodle makers will add some wheat to help give the dough strength and elasticity. She added water carefully, then repeatedly jabbed her fingers into the bowl in sharp motions, making spätzle-like strands as the flour began to come together. Then, with force in her forearms, she pressed into the bowl with broad swipes, rolling the strands into pebbles, rolling the pebbles into a dough. Through this, I noted how the ivory buckwheat turned a gravelly gray when it took in water and how it gave off, I swear, the scent of black sesame. “That’s good,” Sakai said. “You have to talk to your dough. If you’re treating it right, it has a real glow.”

Sakai worked in elegant, nearly ritualistic movements. With one hand, she rotated the dough, using the other to gently pull in its corners, forming a disk with inward pleats; it looked a bit like a millstone to me, but she referred to it as “the chrysanthemum.” She rolled this on its side, the pleats stretching to meet one another at the point of a cone, which she then gently pressed into a near-perfect circle. Then came a series of passes with a rolling pin, a way of curling the dough around the pin like a scroll and stretch-

with enough starch, and they glued themselves together. Start over. Again. But with each batch, knowing Sakai was watching me, I could focus on feeling the stretch of the dough, feeling every movement, feeling the pauses when I lost my rhythm. In that sense it was like yoga, a practice based in the sensation of being a physical being. Only there was lunch to eat at the end of it.

I came home from my lessons eager to start my own little soba life. I acquired. I scoured shops; bought flours, dashi, and dip ingredients, a sweet extra-long rolling pin, a beautiful knife, a traditional cedar cutting guide; and eyed one of those lacquer mixing bowls that would make a mortgage payment blush. I invited a friend over.

The humidity was like a living creature that night, and I couldn’t tell whether that meant I should reduce the water in the dough, or whether the fact that I was literally sweating into it was going to overhydrate it. But the water hit the flour, I could smell that sesame scent again, and I pushed on. I kneaded and rolled, but after half a dozen tries, my chrysanthemum looked again less like a flower and more like a face, maybe a pug’s face. I looked at it, looked at the clock, looked at my hungry friend, and skipped the part where I roll the chrysanthemum into a cone altogether. I rolled out the noodle sheets like an errant pie dough, tearing it in places where I rolled over my own fingers. Who rolls over their own fingers with a rolling pin? I folded the dough up and cut through it not with the even, rhythmic strokes that Sakai says should sound like a horse’s trot, but with a halt-

ing, awkward series of *ca-chunks*, worrying that each cut would be too wide or too thin. I was a mess by the end, cursing my oafish hands, ridiculing myself for not being able to remember how the twist of the wrist should feel when handling the dough. “What kind of hack cook are you?” I sneered at myself.

My friend loved the noodles, chewy and nutty alongside some tempura mushrooms. A great cook and eater, he even asked me to teach him how to make them, so he could make them for his wife. Still, with each batch, better or worse than that night, I found myself furious at too-wonky edges, too-clumsy cuts. My soba life was lame, and I put my tools away in the cupboard.

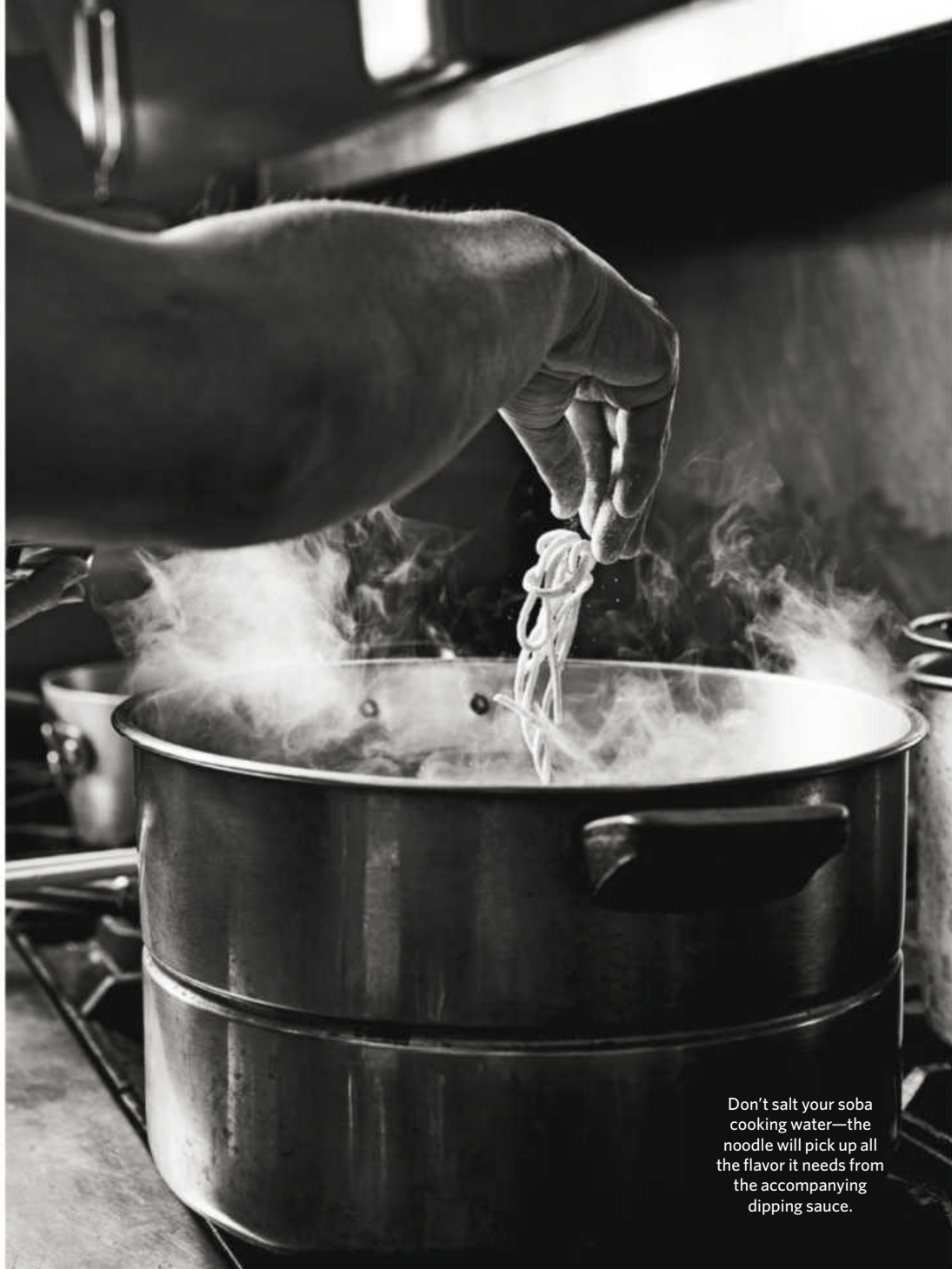
Weeks later, I was talking with another friend. She’d lost the company she ran a few years ago in one brutal, bewildering morning. She wrote a book about it, about re-finding her life by re-treating to the kitchen. In it, there’s a passage where, to get herself out of a funk, she spends the day making an exquisite kind of Chinese dumpling. They sounded impossible: The wrappers are actually tiny, crepe-thin omelets, wrapped delicately around the filling so that they don’t tear. “You made those to calm yourself down?” I asked her. “Because I would be ripping them, driving myself crazy, throwing things across the room.”

“That’s good,” Sakai said. “You have to talk to your dough. If you’re treating it right, it has a real glow.”

ing it to make squared edges, and finally folding and cutting. By the end, as she grasped her soba in little ponytails, patted them to puff away the dusting of starch she used to keep them separated, her noodles were not only beautiful and precise, they looked cared for. There was no waste, no scraggly edges, no subtly wavy noodles where the rolling pin landed a little heavy. They were not perfect, not quite, but I could see how close Sakai was to getting them there.

“Sometimes, my students ask, ‘Can I roll these through a pasta machine?’” she said to me. “And I say yes, of course, but that’s not the point. The practice, connecting with your hands, is the point.” Some forms of perfection you chase because they are objectively perfect, as far as you can tell, with your palate and your training and your nerve endings, which feel the resistance between your teeth and fire off the precise information to your brain to make you use the words “chewy” or “al dente” or “silky.” And some you chase not just because you want their deliciousness, but because there is joy in losing yourself to them.

I scaled out some flour and made a few batches of my own soba with Sakai’s gentle words of guidance: “The chrysanthemum should look like a flower. Yours looks a little like a face. That’s been punched.” And so I worked on the pleating, again. Worked on the rolling, again. Worked on the folding and worked on the cutting, until she said, “Hey, your noodles look really nice!” Only I didn’t dust them



Don't salt your soba cooking water—the noodle will pick up all the flavor it needs from the accompanying dipping sauce.

“Well,” she said, “I feel like it’s okay to make mistakes. I cook to learn. That’s the pleasure, not to perform.”

That word grabbed me: Performing and doing can be entirely different things. Performance is about projection, not acceptance, and even when I was all alone with my soba, I realized I was still performing the making of them—putting myself on stage, watching myself, criticizing every move. It wasn’t just that I didn’t have Sakai’s guidance on the technique, it was that I didn’t have her calm, her letting go. Meditation, it turns out, is not a spectator sport.

But then I got home and looked around. My wife and I were waiting for our baby to be born. I looked at a pile of toys, a wireless monitor, a trash can just for diapers. Speaking of diapers, which ones should we get? Because what I’m

hearing is that getting your kids the wrong kind of diaper will mean they will grow up to hate you, or at the very least not get into college. Wait, sorry, there it is again. My anxiety. My fear that I’m always stressed about work, that I don’t see my friends enough, that I have no idea how to be a father, that my world is actually getting smaller and smaller even as I write about how it’s supposed to get bigger when you learn to see its little alchemies.

I suppose I shouldn’t add the stress of cooking for perfection on top of that. Not for noodles, not for this story. Next time, when the water hits the buckwheat and I smell the scent of sesame again, it will just be dinner, and that will just have to be enough. That’s a kind of meditation, isn’t it? ■

Soba Salad with Lemon-Miso Vinaigrette

Serves 4; 📖 Page 63
Total: 30 min.

Soba noodles form the foundation of a refreshing salad of mixed vegetables and tart miso dressing made with soy sauce, toasted sesame oil, and ginger juice. You can use any hearty, strongly flavored lettuces, such as arugula, endive, or chicory, to balance the earthy noodles.

- 2 1/2 oz. small radicchio leaves
- 2 1/2 oz. small red leaf lettuce leaves
- 24 small shiso or basil leaves
- 16 small grape tomatoes
- 4 small dill tomatos
- 2 small carrots, thinly sliced crosswise
- 1 Persian cucumber, thinly sliced crosswise
- 1 red finger chile
- 1/3 cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 3 Tbsp. fresh lemon juice
- 1 1/2 Tbsp. rice vinegar
- 1 1/2 Tbsp. soy sauce
- 1 Tbsp. white miso paste
- 2 tsp. toasted sesame oil
- 1/2 tsp. sugar
- One 2-inch piece ginger, peeled
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 1 Tbsp. toasted sesame seeds
- 8 oz. Fresh Soba Noodles (see page 59 for recipe) or dried noodles

1 In a large bowl, combine both lettuces with the shiso, tomatoes, dill, carrots, and cucumber. Using a knife, begin thinly slicing the chile from the tip. When you reach the seeds, stop slicing and discard or save the remaining chile for another use. Add the sliced chile to the lettuces in the bowl and toss to combine.

2 In a small bowl, whisk the olive oil with the lemon juice, rice vinegar, soy sauce, miso paste, sesame oil, and sugar. Using a Microplane set over a fine sieve set in a bowl, grate the ginger into the sieve, then press on the solids to drain as much juice as possible into the bowl. Pour 1 teaspoon of the ginger juice into the bowl with the dressing and discard the rest or save for another use. Season the dressing with salt and pepper and whisk until emulsified. Divide the dressing among 4 small ramekins and sprinkle each with some of the sesame seeds.

3 In a large pot of boiling water, cook the soba noodles until al dente, about 3 minutes. Drain the noodles into a colander and rinse under cold running water until

the water runs clear. Drain the noodles again and divide among 4 serving plates. Divide the lettuces and vegetables over the noodles, sprinkle with the remaining sesame seeds, and serve immediately with the dressing on the side.

Hot Soba with Chicken and Egg

Serves 4; 📖 Page 57
Active: 50 min.; Total: 1 hr.

Spinach, soy-and-mirin-basted chicken thighs, and fresh soba noodles add heft to this light, brothy soup spiked with fresh ginger juice. You can cook the chicken and prepare the other ingredients hours ahead of time, but cook the soba noodles just before so they retain their characteristic chew in the soup.

- 4 boneless, skin-on chicken thighs
- Kosher salt
- 1 cup Noodle Sauce Base (see page 78 for recipe)
- 7 1/4 cups Dashi Stock (see page 78 for recipe)
- One 6-inch piece ginger, peeled, plus one 3-inch piece ginger, peeled and julienned
- 8 oz. Fresh Soba Noodles (see page 59 for recipe) or dried noodles
- 2 cups baby spinach
- 2 soft-boiled eggs, peeled and halved lengthwise
- 1/4 cup minced chives
- 1 tsp. toasted black sesame seeds
- 1 tsp. toasted white sesame seeds
- Shichimi togarashi, to garnish (amazon.com)

1 Heat the broiler. On a foil-lined baking sheet, arrange the chicken skin-side-down and, using a paring knife, lightly score the meat every 1/4 inch and season lightly with salt. Broil the chicken thighs, basting every 4 minutes with 1/4 cup of the sauce base and flipping halfway, until cooked through and golden brown, about 16 minutes. Transfer the chicken to a cutting board, let rest for 10 minutes, then slice each thigh into 3 thick slices.

2 In a large saucepan, combine the remaining 3/4 cup sauce base with the dashi. Using a Microplane set over a fine sieve set in a bowl, grate the 6-inch piece of ginger into the sieve, pressing on the solids to drain as much juice as possible into the bowl. Pour 2 tablespoons of the ginger juice into the saucepan and discard the rest or save for another use. Bring the soup to a boil over medium heat and keep warm.

3 In a large pot of boiling water, cook the soba noodles until al dente, about 3 minutes. Using tongs, lift the noodles from

the water and transfer to a colander and rinse under cold running water until the water runs clear. Drain the noodles again and divide among 4 large serving bowls. Add the spinach to the boiling water and cook until just wilted, about 1 minute. Drain the spinach, pressing to remove as much water as possible, and divide among each serving of noodles.

4 Ladle the warm soup over the spinach and noodles in each bowl and top each with 3 chicken slices. Place 1 egg half and one-quarter of the chives in each bowl and then garnish with one-quarter each of the julienned ginger and both sesame seeds. Garnish each bowl with schichimi togarashi and serve immediately.

Cold Soba with Mushroom and Leek Seiro Broth

Serves 4; 📖 Pages 54-55
Total: 30 min.

To eat this dish, lift cold soba noodles, one mouthful at a time, with chopsticks, dip them into the hot seiro, or broth, flavored with sautéed leeks and enoki mushrooms, then slurp them up quickly. This method retains the soba noodles' integrity, preventing them from swelling or getting soggy while sitting in the hot broth.

- 1/4 cup vegetable oil
- 2 Tbsp. unsalted butter
- 1 leek, white part only, trimmed, halved lengthwise, and cut into 2 1/2-inch-long, 1/4-inch-wide strips
- 7 oz. enoki mushrooms
- 3 cups plus 2 Tbsp. Dashi Stock (see page 78 for recipe)
- 3/4 cup Noodle Sauce Base (see page 78 for recipe)
- 8 oz. Fresh Soba Noodles (see page 59 for recipe) or dried noodles
- 2 lemon zest strips (removed with a vegetable peeler), julienned

1 In a medium saucepan, heat the oil and butter over medium-high. Add the leek and cook, stirring, until soft, about 4 minutes. Stir in the mushrooms and cook until softened, 2 to 3 minutes. Pour in the dashi and sauce base and bring to a boil. Remove from the heat and keep warm.

2 In a large pot of boiling water, cook the soba noodles until al dente, about 3 minutes. Drain the noodles into a colander and rinse under cold running water until the water runs clear. Drain the noodles again and divide among 4 serving plates. Divide the leeks, mushrooms, and sauce among 4 small serving bowls, top each with the lemon zest, and serve with the noodles.

Soba makes a delightfully chewy addition to a light spring salad. Use radicchio and red leaf lettuce with some shiso leaves (see page 62 for recipe), or any other strongly flavored lettuces.



Is Rome's Cuisine Eternal?

As the culinary landscape of the Eternal City shifts away from traditional Roman fare, we go in search of the disappearing dishes that are worth remembering forever

By Katie Parla

Photographs by Andrea Wyner

Someday soon, perhaps, *lumache alla romana* (plump snails braised in a spicy tomato sauce with mint) will disappear entirely from menus across Rome. At one time, snails were the centerpiece of a local ritual: Hungry Romans headed to suburban fields and vineyards to collect them in late June and cook them into this earthy, mildly piquant dish celebrating the feast day of Saint John the Baptist. It was a tradition unique to Rome, and snails were one of the things that defined *cucina romana*.

But Romans don't seem to care for snails anymore. Or liver and sweet caramelized onions. Or noodle soup with delicate hunks of tough-to-clean skate. Or many of the staple ingredients that once made Roman cuisine distinct. The city's trinity of traditional dining venues—the

elegant ristorante, the rustic trattoria, and the bare-bones osteria—now competes with French bistros, gastropubs, all-you-can-eat promotions, fast-food chains, and an alarming number of mediocre burger joints offering plenty of variety but little substance. A proper Roman dinner once followed a prescribed ritual, a timeless pattern—the antipasto, the primo, the secondo, the contorno, and the dolce—and meals were long, wine-fueled events, portions were manageable, and when you booked a table it was yours for the night. Now, on the increasingly rare occasions when Romans go out for traditional fare, they eat fewer courses, drink less wine, and spend less time at the table. Trattoria owners are obliged to adapt or perish. Restaurants now serve super-sized pasta portions, they turn



Spaghetti with garlic, olive oil, and chile flakes (see page 74 for recipe) is part of a Roman culinary tradition that a handful of classic restaurants are fighting to preserve.



tables, and, thanks to the E.U.'s globalized food system, dishes often aren't made with the fresh, local ingredients that defined the flavors of the past.

There are a handful of culinary preservationists keeping the city's cuisine alive, thankfully—chefs and restaurant owners who are carrying on the traditions of their family-run restaurants. One is Claudio Gargioli. He's in his kitchen six days a week, buttoned into his gray chef's coat, emerging occasionally to greet regulars. You can see him from the dining room, moving around a broad iron stove, tossing pasta in warped aluminum pans, and seasoning gently simmering pots of oxtails. Since Claudio's father opened his eponymous trattoria, Armando al Pantheon, in 1961, three generations of Gargioli have transformed this small family business into a Roman landmark known for its soulful renderings of *cucina romana*. When I sit in the dining room watching Claudio work, twirling his comforting *spaghetti ajo, ojo, e peperoncino* around a fork, the place, like the hulking mass of the neighboring Pantheon, feels gratifyingly constant, resistant to the evolution overtaking so much of the city.

Over the centuries, *cucina romana* has become a pillar of Rome's cultural patrimony, but by embracing a global approach to food, Rome risks losing this fundamental part of its identity—the incredible dishes that used to define the city's cuisine. The traditional foods and flavors of the city are a direct link to the past and are as precious and worthy of protecting as any piazza, chapel, or ancient relic. Here are some of Rome's classic restaurants and the timeless dishes they are saving.

6 Roman Classics

Trattoria al Moro

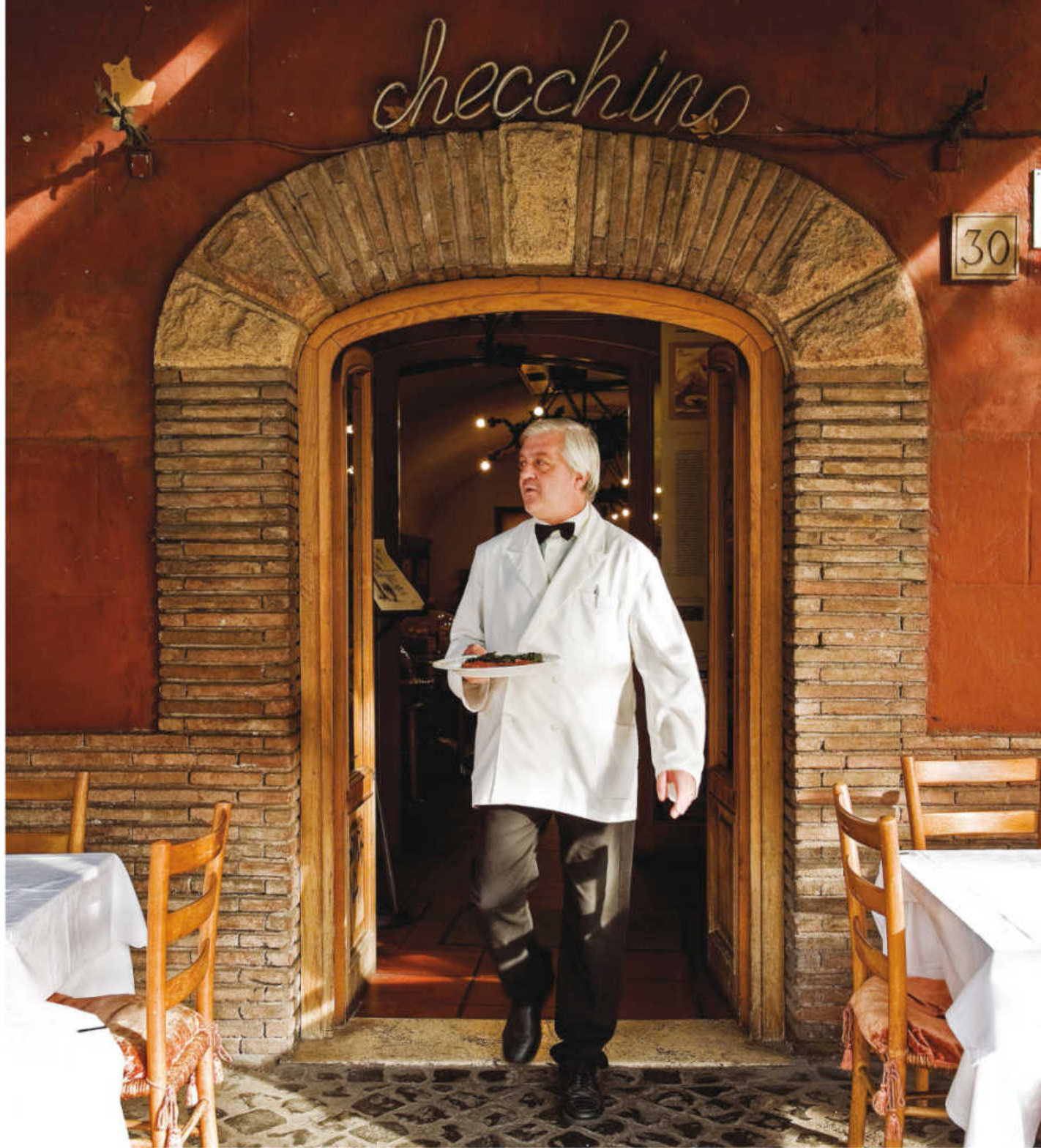
1 *Lumache alla Romana*, recipe p. 74 SPICY TOMATO-BRAISED SNAILS WITH MINT

A ten-minute walk from the Pantheon—and about 300 feet from the Trevi Fountain—a window-paned door admits visitors to the time capsule that is Trattoria al Moro. Helmed by four successive generations of Romagnolis since the 1920s, the place began humbly, slowly building a reputation among actors at the nearby Teatro Quirino. In time, it became the haunt of local artists, performers, and filmmakers, including Federico Fellini, who cast Mario Romagnoli in his 1969 film *Satyricon*. It remains a destination for well-heeled, decades-long regulars who, in typical Roman style, receive special pampering from the notoriously aloof owners. Third-generation Franco Romagnoli and his children Elisabetta and Andrea are unwavering in their commitment to tradition, and they serve a huge array of forgotten classics in their three wood-paneled, overcrowded dining rooms. *Lumache alla romana*, snails cooked in a sauce spiked with anchovies, chile, and mint, is served exclusively around the Feast of Saint John the Baptist. The slightly spicy dish is now virtually absent from Roman tables, as snails, eels, and other fringe foods have fallen out of fashion.

RIGHT: MATT TAYLOR-GROSS



When in season in June, snails (opposite right, see page 74 for recipe) are a fixture on the menu at Trattoria al Moro, where accolades and art from patrons adorn the walls.



Checchino dal 1887

2 *Garofolato*, recipe p. 69
BEEF BRAISED WITH TOMATOES AND CLOVES

Leaving the *centro storico* and heading south to Testaccio, Checchino dal 1887 is where the Mariani family preserves and promotes historic dishes in the shadow of Monte dei Cocci, an archeological site composed of tens of millions of discarded terra-cotta jugs that were used to carry olive oil from Andalusia to Rome. Chef Elio Mariani serves one of the last surviving

examples of *garofolato*, a dish named for its main seasoning, *chiodi di garofano*, cloves. Veal or beef eye of round (whichever is available from their purveyor that day) is simmered in a tomato sauce perfumed with a healthy dose of the dried spice, which isn't used as much as it used to be. "I think that cooking traditional food and continuing to do it against all odds is important," Mariani says. "It's a safeguard that protects the very definition of being a real Roman." His neighbors around Monte dei Cocci include American-style brunch spots, a budget sushi restaurant, and a place that doubles as a Tex-Mex restaurant and discoteca.

Beef Braised with Tomatoes and Cloves (Garofolato)

Serves 6

Active: 45 min.; Total: 4 hr. 15 min.

In Rome, lean cuts like veal rump roast or beef eye of round are braised in tomato and red wine and perfumed with cloves—the spice's heady scent melding pleasantly with the other ingredients in the sauce. Broccoli rabe or dandelion greens, sautéed in olive oil and garlic, make the perfect accompaniment to this rich winter braise.

- 2 Tbsp. rendered pork lard or vegetable oil
- One 2-lb. veal rump roast or beef eye of round, tied with kitchen twine (ask your butcher to do this)
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 1 celery stalk, finely chopped
- 1 garlic clove, peeled and smashed
- 1 medium carrot, finely chopped
- 1/2 medium yellow onion, finely chopped
- 1 cup red wine
- 12 whole cloves
- One 14-oz. can whole peeled tomatoes in juice, crushed by hand

1 In a large saucepan, heat the lard over medium-high. Season the veal all over with salt and pepper, add to the pan, and cook, turning as needed, until golden brown all over, about 10 minutes. Transfer the meat to a plate and return the pan to the heat.

2 Add the celery, garlic, carrot, and onion to the pan and cook, stirring, until caramelized, about 15 minutes. Pour in the wine and cook, scraping the bottom of the pot, for 1 minute. Stir in the cloves, tomatoes, and 2 cups water, return the veal to the pan, and bring the sauce to a boil. Reduce the heat to maintain a simmer and cook, uncovered, until the veal is very tender, about 3 hours.

3 Remove the pan from the heat and let the meat cool in the sauce for 30 minutes. Transfer the veal to a cutting board and slice into 1/2-inch-thick slices. Lightly mash the tomato sauce in the pan and spoon it over the veal to serve.





Armando al Pantheon

3 *Pere Cotte con le Prugne* BAKED PEARS AND PRUNES WITH RED WINE SAUCE

4 *Spaghetti Ajo, Ojo, e Peperoncino*, recipe p. 74 SPAGHETTI WITH GARLIC, OLIVE OIL, AND CHILE

In the past, *spaghetti ajo, ojo, e peperoncino* (pasta coated with garlic and chile-infused oil) was a regular late-night staple. Long meals would end with this simple, subtly spicy dish, which was served after dessert. "It signaled the end of a meal," says Claudio Gargioli, the chef at Armando al Pantheon. Now, he features it on his menu alongside popular primi like carbonara, *gricia*, and cacio e pepe, because a full-on Roman meal doesn't end with pasta anymore; it ends with dessert. Popular local sweets on the dessert menus around town have themselves been replaced by generic pan-Italian favorites like panna cotta and tiramisù, but remaining true to its roots, Armando al Pantheon serves the old-school Roman classic of pears and prunes baked with red wine. It's a rare example of the waning local custom of eating fiber-rich, digestion-aiding desserts that showcase the simple, sweet, and caramelized notes that were once typical.

The traditional foods of Rome are as worthy of protecting as any chapel or ancient relic

Baked Pears and Prunes with Red Wine Sauce (Pere Cotte con le Prugne)

Serves 6; 📖 Page 71

Active: 20 min.; Total: 2 ½ hr.

In this simple dessert, whole pears are baked for hours in a red wine syrup until spoonably soft. Prunes add depth and complexity to the sauce, so choose the highest-quality you can find for this dish. This recipe calls for Bosc pears, but you can substitute any larger variety of pears, such as Bartlett or D'Anjou.

- 6 large Bosc pears
- 2 cups red wine
- $\frac{2}{3}$ cup sugar
- 24 large prunes, pitted

1 Heat the oven to 350°. Using a melon baller, scoop from the base of each pear to remove its core and discard the cores.

2 In a 12-inch shallow saucepan, combine the wine with the sugar and 2 cups water and bring to a boil, stirring to dissolve the sugar. Lay the pears in the syrup, distribute the prunes evenly around the pears, and bake until the pears are tender and the liquid is reduced, about 2 hours.

3 Transfer the pan to a rack and let the pears cool for 10 minutes in the syrup. Place 1 pear each onto a serving plate and spoon over the prunes and red wine sauce to serve.





Clockwise from top left: Via Della Corda, off Piazza Campo de' Fiori; spicy skate soup with romanesco (see page 73 for recipe); Giuliano Esposito (right) of Mordi e Vai; calf's liver sandwiches (see page 73 for recipe).



Trattoria da Cesare

5 *Minestra di Broccoli e Arzilla* SKATE AND ROMANESCO SOUP

In the Gianicolense district, Leonardo Vignoli and Maria Pia Cicconi of Trattoria da Cesare serve a menu guided by the seasons, a feature of the *cucina romana* that is no longer a given. During the cool months, when romanesco is in season, da Cesare makes *minestra di broccoli e arzilla*. The soup, made with skate and romanesco, used to be a fixture on the Roman table, but as a greater variety of fish became available in the capital, skate, which is bony and cartilage-riddled, was abandoned for less labor-intensive species. Serving this delicious relic of Roman cuisine is particularly meaningful for Leonardo. "For me this recipe means anchoring a part of history in the present," he tells me. "Often, if we change too much and too quickly without remembering where we come from, we risk putting the past on a shelf to collect dust and be forgotten."

Skate and Romanesco Soup (Minestra di Broccoli e Arzilla)

Serves 6; 📖 Page 72

Active: 1 hr.; Total: 1½ hr.

For this skate and romanesco soup, thickened with spaghetti, have your fishmonger remove the skin from the skate fillets, but leave the bones in—they are essential for flavoring the soup. If you can't find romanesco, cauliflower makes a fine substitute.

- 1½ lbs. skinless, bone-in skate fillets (see note, above)
- 3 flat-leaf parsley sprigs
- 1 celery stalk, thinly sliced
- 1 medium carrot, thinly sliced
- 1 small yellow onion, halved
- 2 Tbsp. olive oil
- 1 garlic clove, peeled and smashed
- ½ tsp. crushed red chile flakes
- 1 head of romanesco or cauliflower, leaves trimmed, cored, and finely chopped
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 2 Tbsp. canned tomato purée
- 4 oz. spaghetti, broken into pieces

1 In a large saucepan, combine the skate with the parsley, celery, carrot, onion, and 5 cups water. Bring to a boil, reduce the heat to maintain a simmer, and cook, skimming any foam that rises to the surface, until the skate flesh falls away

from the bone easily, about 30 minutes. Using a slotted spoon, transfer the skate to a bowl, let cool, then pick out and discard the bones, leaving the meat in the bowl. Pour the cooking liquid through a fine sieve into a bowl and add enough water to make 6 cups total.

2 Return the saucepan to low heat and add the olive oil. When the oil begins to shimmer, add the garlic and cook until lightly browned, about 4 minutes. Stir in the chile flakes and cook until fragrant, 1 minute. Add the romanesco or cauliflower, season with salt and pepper, and cook, stirring, until softened, about 10 minutes. Stir in the reserved cooking liquid and the tomato purée and bring to a boil. Stir in the spaghetti and cook until al dente, about 10 minutes. Remove the pan from the heat, stir in the skate meat, and season with salt and pepper before serving.

Calf's Liver, Caramelized Onion, and Tomato Sandwiches (Fegato alla Macellara)

Serves 6; 📖 Page 72

Total: 45 min.

Thin strips of calf's liver are seared until brown and tender, then mixed with sweet caramelized onions and tomatoes and piled on toasted ciabatta rolls. Heating a

Mordi e Vai

6 *Fegato alla Macellara* CALF'S LIVER, ONION, AND TOMATO SANDWICHES

Mordi e Vai in the Testaccio Market attracts budget-conscious Romans hungry for hearty local flavors. Mara and Sergio Esposito and their son Giuliano opened the stall in 2012 when the Testaccio neighborhood's market was transferred to a modern building beside the former slaughterhouse. They make a dazzling range of meat-rich and offal-heavy recipes culled from the Esposito family archives, including *fegato alla macellara* ("butcher's style" liver cooked with onions and tomatoes), a nod to Sergio's previous gig at his family's butchery stall. The earthy and sweet onion-laden dish is a flavorful reminder of Testaccio's past, when slaughterhouse workers used every part of an animal. Liver, once a common ingredient, has fallen out of favor as Romans swap organs and poor cuts for more impressive, expensive ones.

cast-iron skillet over high for 5 minutes enables you to caramelize the liver strips without overcooking them.

- 1¼ lbs. cleaned calf's liver, cut into 1-inch-wide, ¼-inch-thick strips
- ¼ cup plus 2 Tbsp. olive oil
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 4 medium yellow onions, thinly sliced lengthwise
- 6 oz. cherry tomatoes, halved
- 2 tsp. finely chopped thyme
- 6 ciabatta sandwich loaves, split

1 Heat a large cast-iron skillet over high for 5 minutes. Place the liver strips on paper towels and pat dry. Pour ¼ cup olive oil into the skillet, then lay half the liver strips in the skillet, season with salt and pepper, and cook, undisturbed, until strips are browned on the bottom and the tops are still lightly pink, about 2 minutes. Transfer the strips to a plate and repeat cooking the remaining liver strips.

2 Return the skillet to medium heat, add the onions, and cook, stirring occasionally, until softened and caramelized, about 20 minutes. Stir in the tomatoes and thyme, season with salt and pepper, and cook until the tomatoes begin to fall apart, about 5 minutes. Scrape the onions and tomatoes onto the liver strips, add the remaining 2 tablespoons olive oil, and toss to combine. Divide the liver and onions among the sandwich loaves and serve immediately.



Travel Guide ROME

WHERE TO EAT

Armando al Pantheon

Defying the rule you that can't get a great meal next to the Pantheon, the Gargioli family's institution has been serving flawless classics since the 1960s. *Salita dei Crescenzi 31; armandoalpantheon.it*

Checchino dal 1887

Built into the side of an archaeological park, this historic place transitioned from a simple tavern into an elegant restaurant, all the while focusing on poorer, traditional cuts of meat and offal. *Via di Monte Testaccio 30; checchino-dal-1887.com*

Mordi e Vai

Retired butcher Sergio Esposito and his family opened this stall in the Testaccio Market in 2012 to serve historic Roman recipes to budget-conscious market workers and students. *Box #15 in the Nuovo Mercato di Testaccio; mordievai.it*

Trattoria al Moro

Known for its highly traditional food and old-school atmosphere, Trattoria al Moro serves delicious, if somewhat pricey, *cucina romana* just a short walk from the Trevi Fountain. *Vicolo delle Bollette 13; ristorantealmororoma.com*

Trattoria da Cesare

After years of working in fine dining establishments, chef Leonardo Vignoli returned to his Roman roots and serves excellent trattoria fare paired with an exceptional and affordable wine list. *Via del Casaleto 45; trattoriadacesare.it*

WHERE TO STAY

G-Rough

The G-Rough, a suites-only boutique hotel, marries art, fashion, tranquility, and luxury in a converted 17th-century edifice just steps from the busy Piazza Navona. *Piazza di Pasquino 69; g-rough.com*

Palazzo Dama

Located just outside Piazza del Popolo, this five-star boutique hotel fills the fabulously restored villa and grounds of the former home of the aristocratic Malaspina family. *Lungotevere Arnaldo da Brescia 2; palazzodama.com*

Spicy Tomato-Braised Snails with Mint (Lumache alla Romana)

Serves 6 as an appetizer; 📖 Page 66
Total: 50 min.

These snails, braised in a tomato sauce flavored with pungent anchovies and spicy chile flakes, are typically eaten around the Feast of Saint John the Baptist in late June. While wild or farmed snails are traditional for this dish, high-quality canned snails are the best and most accessible option (see page 78).

- 1 Tbsp. extra-virgin olive oil, plus more for drizzling
- 1/2 tsp. crushed red chile flakes
- 1 garlic clove, peeled and smashed
- 2 oil-packed anchovy fillets, drained and minced
- One 8-oz. can whole peeled tomatoes in juice, crushed by hand
- One 7-oz. can large snails, rinsed and drained
- 1 Tbsp. finely chopped mint leaves
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
- Toasted ciabatta, for serving

1 In a medium saucepan, heat the olive oil over low until it begins to shimmer. Add the chile flakes and garlic and cook, stirring, until both are fragrant, about 1 minute. Stir in the anchovies and cook until they melt into the oil, about 4 minutes. Add the tomatoes, bring to a simmer, and cook until slightly reduced, about 10 minutes.

2 Stir in the snails and 3/4 cup water, bring to a simmer, and cook, stirring occasionally,

until the snails are tender, about 18 minutes. Remove the pan from the heat, stir in the mint, and season with salt and pepper. Spoon the snails into a shallow serving bowl, drizzle with more olive oil, and serve over slices of toasted ciabatta.

Spaghetti with Garlic, Olive Oil, and Chile (Spaghetti Ajo, Ojo, e Peperoncino)

Serves 4; 📖 Page 65
Total: 25 min.

This elemental pasta classic is a ubiquitous first course in Rome's trattorias, but was at one time served at the end of the meal, a tradition that is now lost. As with all simple dishes, using the highest-quality ingredients is crucial to achieving the best flavor.

- Kosher salt
- 1 lb. spaghetti
- 1/3 cup extra-virgin olive oil, plus more for drizzling
- 2 garlic cloves, peeled and smashed
- 2 dried red peperoncino chiles, stemmed and broken in half
- 1 Tbsp. roughly chopped flat-leaf parsley, plus more to garnish

In a large pot of boiling, salted water, cook the pasta until al dente. Meanwhile, in a large skillet, heat the olive oil over low. Add the garlic and cook, stirring, until lightly browned, about 3 minutes. Stir in the chiles and cook until fragrant, 1 minute. Drain the pasta, reserving 1/4 cup of the cooking water, and add to the skillet along with the cooking water and parsley and toss to combine. Drizzle with more olive oil and garnish with more parsley before serving.

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• FROM THE SAVEUR •

TEST KITCHEN

DIY sprouts, basic Japanese sauces, and tips for a perfect layer cake



from
Sprouts
page 12

With a little bit of planning and patience, you can grow your own sprouts at home quite easily, without much effort or equipment. Start with 2 cups of any seed or dried legume—chickpeas, lentils, black-eyed peas, or sunflower seeds—and soak them in water for 8 to 12 hours or overnight. The next day, drain the legumes almost completely, leaving the last few trickles of water behind. Transfer them to a large, cylindrical container and cover the opening with cheesecloth secured with a rubber band or string. Lay the container on its side on a rimmed baking sheet, propping the bottom of the container on the rim of the baking sheet so it gently slopes downward and the legumes fall naturally into a shallow, even layer in the container. Allow the legumes to sit like this for at least 12 hours and then fill the container with water again, drain immediately, and reposition the container on the baking sheet (this ensures the legumes stay hydrated). Let the legumes sit for another 12 hours; by then they should have sprouted little tails. You can use the sprouted legumes immediately or transfer them, still covered in cheesecloth to allow them to breathe, to the refrigerator and store them for about 5 days. —Farideh Sadeghin

HOMEGROWN SPROUTS

Transform dried beans and seeds into fresh additions to late-winter dishes



from
Rome
page 64

THE OTHER DARK MEAT

You should be eating snails—here are the ones to buy

Here at *SAVEUR*, we're borderline obsessive about snails. When we go out for old-fashioned French fare, we inevitably split a couple servings of them, drowned in garlic and parsley butter. Back in the test kitchen, we poach them in olive oil and serve them on toast with pesto or a squeeze of lemon as hors d'oeuvres to go with Friday evening cocktails. Snails may seem hard to procure, but there are several producers that ship high-quality ones all over the country, like delicate, basil-fed farmed snails from California, available at Mikuni Wild Harvest (mikuniwildharvest.com). We also favor wild Burgundy snails, like those from Sarl Henri Maire, and the wild-caught snails from La Maison de L'Escargot, both available from the self-described "Snailman" (potironne.com), a French producer that sells 7 1/5-oz. tins as well as prepared herbed butter and snails in their shells. —Ben Mims



from
Soba
page 54

THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF GREAT SOBA SAUCES

The dipping sauces that accompany homemade soba noodles (see page 59) employ two basic building blocks, used in different proportions. One is dashi, a seaweed stock flavored with bonito flakes and, here, dried mushrooms. The other is salty and sweet kaeshi, made of soy sauce, mirin (look for "hon-mirin," which denotes the natural version, made without corn syrup), and sugar. Both are easy to make at home and keep for quite some time. —B.M.



Dashi

In a medium saucepan, combine 8 cups filtered water with 3 dried shiitake mushrooms and let stand for 1 hour. Add one 3-inch-square sheet of kombu and bring the water to a boil. Remove the pan from the heat, discard the mushrooms and kombu, and stir in 2 oz. bonito flakes. Let steep for 10 minutes, pour the dashi through a fine sieve set over a bowl, and discard the bonito flakes. Store the dashi in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to 1 week. Makes 8 cups.



Kaeshi

In a small saucepan, combine 1 cup soy sauce with 2 1/2 Tbsp. mirin and 2 1/2 Tbsp. sugar. Bring to a boil over medium-high heat and cook until the sugar dissolves, 2 to 3 minutes. Remove from the heat and let the sauce cool completely. Store in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to 3 months. Makes 1 1/4 cups.

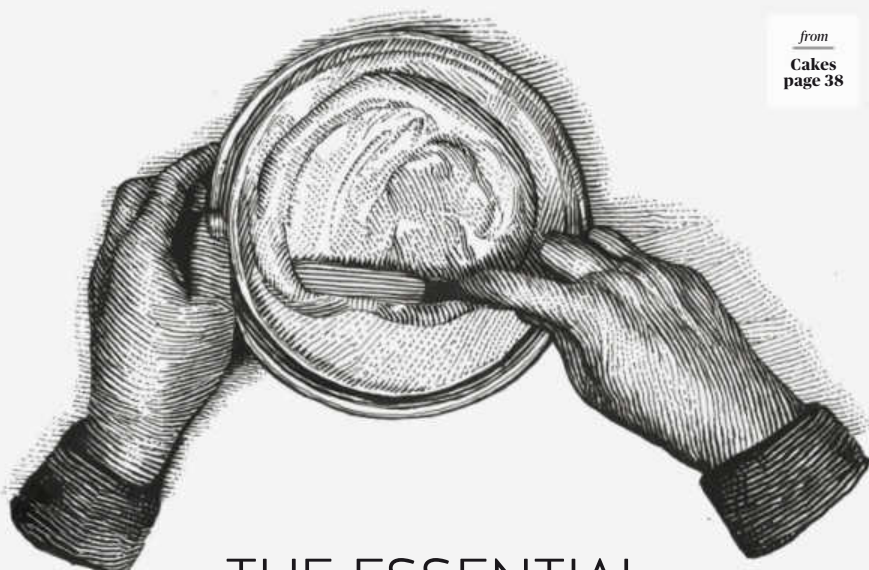


from
Anatolia
page 44

A CURD BY ANY OTHER NAME

While English **clotted cream** (page 25) and Turkish **kaymak** (page 52) may be culturally distinct, they're actually very similar. Both are made from whole milk cooked until the curds rise to the top. The kaymak curds (left) are denser, and are sold rolled up like a jelly roll; just break them apart and drizzle with honey to serve. The clotted cream curds are sold in a heap, ready to spread. Use both instead of butter on warm toast or with macerated fruit and cookies for dessert. —F.S.

from
Cakes
page 38



THE ESSENTIAL TOOL FOR LAYER CAKE DOMINATION

How to ensure it all stacks up evenly

Evenness is the key to a properly stacked layer cake: The batter needs to be spread to an even height, without peaks or valleys, and each band of frosting needs to be uniform in depth. The best tool to get those even layers of batter and frosting (and one of the most indispensable tools for baking, period) is a small offset spatula, a thin strip of metal set below its handle by an inch. In bakeries and restaurants, larger offset spatulas (both in length and width) are used for smoothing giant sheet pans of batter and spreading large swaths of frosting, while smaller ones are used for more detailed decorating. I find the large ones clunky when making a single cake at home and prefer the smaller spatula for the task, allowing me to spread cake batter evenly in the pan and apply a consistent coat of frosting with precision. Williams-Sonoma makes a beautiful yet utilitarian version (\$13 for the 4-inch-blade spatula; williams-sonoma.com). —B.M.

SPRAY YOUR BAKING PANS WITH MAGIC

When you love baking cakes as much as I do, you don't want anything to get in the way of enjoying the process. The task of greasing pans, a necessary evil, can be tedious and messy, but ever since I gave nonstick baking spray a shot years ago, I've never returned to the old-school butter and flour method. The spray eliminates the need to painstakingly grease and then flour pans and other baking molds. Give it a try next time you bake a cake and see how much happier you can be, too. —B.M.



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Drumming Up Dinner

ZOYA VILLAGE, KITALE, KENYA, DECEMBER 25, 2005

Story and Photograph by Philipp Engelhorn

The children, giggling, scooped up handfuls of the winged termites—known as “white ants”—that were pouring out from the ground in droves. My friend and I had driven seven hours on a dusty road from Nairobi to a small village in the brush of western Kenya to meet with the Kituyi family, one of many who have made a tradition of gathering these insects, most abundant during the rainy season, and eating them fresh or fried and mixed with rice. It was dusk, the ideal time to summon the bugs. The family led us to the harvest site by their home in the wide Rift Valley, where they laid down wooden branches and built little mud

traps around the holes of the ant mounds. As they began drumming against the wood to imitate the sound of rain, the ants rushed from the ground, forming jittery piles in the little traps. Following the example of those around me, I snatched the insects from the ground or the air by their wings and took a taste. The flavor was slightly sweet and the texture surprisingly pleasant. With the children scampering about, all of them home from school for the holidays, there was a jovial air to that evening meal, maybe because of the kindness of the Kituyis, or maybe because my dinner, for the first time, was flitting through the air and flapping in my mouth.

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